THE SEARCH FOR MEANING:

A study of the perspectives of
Viktor Frankl and H. Richard Niebuhr
and their use in a small group study
for the Local Church

A professional project
presented to the faculty of
The School of Theology at Claremont
in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree
Doctor of Ministry

Alan R. Strout

May 1983

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This professional project, completed by

Alan R. Strout

has been presented to and accepted by the Faculty of the School of Theology at Claremont in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

Faculty Committee

Paul Sherman

John B. Cobb Jr.

April 8, 1983
Date

Joseph C. Hough
Dean

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ABSTRACT

This project addresses itself to the search for meaning as seen from the psychotherapeutic approach of Viktor Frankl and the theological approach of H. Richard Niebuhr. It seeks to be of help to the church, the pastor, and the individual as they deal with meaning and value questions.

The project sets about this task by first exploring the perspectives of Frankl and Niebuhr on the search for meaning. In the chapter on Frankl such topics as the freedom of the will, the will to meaning, and the discovery and realization of meaning are considered. The discussion of Niebuhr explores the search for meaning from the faith perspective and includes topics on responsibility, the movement from natural faith to radical monotheism, and the finding of meaning through revelation.

Once the perspectives of Frankl and Niebuhr are discussed, the project then attempts to integrate their insights in the form of a small group study experience and offers a leaders' guide for a group on the search for meaning. The seven group sessions have suggestions for prayer and meditation exercises, group building, and scriptural foundations, all of which apply to the topics: the search for meaning, search for the center of value, search for meaning versus the search for self-fulfillment, meaning and law, realizing

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creative values, experiential values, and attitudinal values. Each session includes suggested background material on Frankl and Niebuhr that presents how their insights contribute to that particular aspect of the search for meaning.

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Chapter I

INTRODUCTION

A. THE ISSUE ADDRESSED BY THE PROJECT

The issue addressed by this project is one raised initially by Viktor Frankl in his Logotherapeutic approach to psychotherapy which highlights a concern for the sense of meaninglessness in peoples' lives. The project will explore this concern which Frankl raises and bring to it the faith approach of H. Richard Niebuhr in a way which will be useful for the pastor in the local church who deals with people struggling with meaning and value questions in their lives.

B. THE IMPORTANCE OF THE SUBJECT

1. For the Minister

Among the various roles of the minister is that of pastoral counselor. While there are many instances in which the minister is called upon to use counseling skills, it is probably safe to say that most do not have the clinical training necessary to do psychotherapy with the same degree of expertise as the licensed therapist and probably should neither attempt to do so, nor expect that of themselves. The minister should know and respect his or her own limitations. The minister's special training and qualification is as an

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expert in the resources of scripture, tradition, experience, and reason to help people reflect on and understand their faith. But the minister should also be an expert in assisting people discover meaning and purpose for their lives in terms of this faith. This project attempts to be one set of tools for doing so.

2. For the Church

In becoming familiar with Frankl's work I have become aware of the number of persons in (and out) of the church who come to me with problems which, I believe, are not pathological, but which instead arise out of a sense of meaninglessness. This may take a variety of forms: a general dissatisfaction with their life; feelings of uselessness; low self-worth; an emptiness resulting from lack of strong commitments to anyone or anything; the reverse, being overwhelmed with commitments that appear to have no unifying purpose and which fail to provide, for all their activity, any significant meaning or value. Obviously psycho-social causes are also at work in all of these to some extent, and the minister must understand this too. This project intends to provide a tool by which parishioners, in a small group setting, can raise issues of meaning and value, and struggle with them in the context of faith.

C. DEFINITION OF TERMS

1. Inclusive Language

In response to the concern for inclusive language

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this project will recognize the lack of inclusive language in quotations by putting parentheses around male gendered pronouns. By doing so the project seeks to say: "let it be understood by the reader that all people are thought of, in this context, by the project."

2. For Frankl

The definition of a few terms will serve as an opportunity to present some introduction and orientation to Frankl's theory. Let us consider the terms logotherapy, medical ministry, meaning and value, and existential vacuum.

a. Logotherapy. "Logotherapy regards its assignment as that of assisting the patient to find meaning in (his) life."[1] Therapy in the past has dealt with the physical (somatic) dimension of persons, or it has dealt with the mental (psychic) dimension (psychotherapy). What Frankl has done is to raise to consciousness the need for a therapy to face seriously a third human dimension, the spiritual or noetic dimension (from the Greek noos). Logos here refers to "meaning", and points to a dimension of human life from which meaning, conscience, freedom, responsibility and love arise. For all persons there is a specific meaning, a task, an assignment which life puts to them. Emphasizing responsibleness as essential to what it is to be human, Logotherapy attempts to help persons find the "logos" of their existence;

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[1]Viktor Frankl, Man's Search for Meaning (New York: Washington Square, 1959) p. 163.

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to become aware of their own responsibleness. The "Will to Meaning" is the prime motivating factor within us, for Frankl, and in the therapeutic setting raises concerns and questions for value, meaning, and purpose in life which traditional therapies have had no basis or guidance for dealing with. Naturally the concerns arising from this "spiritual" dimension are often ignored and circumvented by doctors and clinicians (please note that this should not be related to the meanings the word "spirit" evokes in religious understandings--there is no "necessary" connection; the dimension exists in the religious and non-religious alike). Logotherapy, then is suggested as a supplement to psychotherapy that focuses primarily on this third dimension as a source of neurosis, and as an influencing factor in disturbances which have psychogenic and somatogenic sources as well. Its aim is to help persons exercise their unique human dimension, their responsibleness, in fulfilling the meaning of their existence: "Logotherapy is ultimately education toward responsibility."[2]

b. Medical Ministry. In cases where an individual is physically incapacitated due to illness or injury, Logotherapy offers "Medical Ministry." Here Logotherapy is not technically "therapy" so much as it is a treating of a person's attitude toward the unchangeable effects of his or her condition. The goal of Medical Ministry is to help people deal constructively with suffering in such a way that they

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[2]Viktor Frankl, The Doctor and the Soul (New York: Vintage, 1955) p. xvi.

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may still realize meaning for their lives. Again a distinction is to be drawn between this and specifically religious connotations of the word "ministry". There is no "necessary" connection. The concern for Frankl is not the soul's "salvation" but its "health" as a conscious, responsible being.[3] To give a concrete example of Medical Ministry, Frankl insists that when the surgeon completes an operation the job is not finished if the patient, upon discovering its outcome, considers or attempts to commit suicide. The doctor has the opportunity and responsibility to deal not only on a physical level, but on the level of helping the patient struggle with finding meaning despite the possible loss of a limb or the incurability of a disease. Again the focus of Medical Ministry is upon dealing with the attitude of persons toward their own condition where the usual avenues of actualizing meaning in their lives have been closed off due to some inhibiting injury or illness: "Psycho-therapy has been concerned with (man's) capacity to work and to enjoy life; Medical Ministry is concerned with the capacity to suffer."[4] As suggested, Medical Ministry belongs in the work of every physician. "The surgeon should have recourse to it as much and as often as the neurologist or psychiatrist."[5]

c. Meaning and Value. I would like to add a brief definition of two other terms which might get confused in Frankl's writings: meaning and value. Joseph B. Fabry

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[3]Ibid., p. 277. [4]Ibid., p. xii. [5]Ibid., p. 281.

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suggests that while the two terms were originally used almost synonymously, they have been gradually more sharply distinguished.[6] The word "meaning" has the more narrow connotation of applying to a particular person and situation. The underlying assumption is that each individual is unique; from one's potentials, strengths, weaknesses, to one's unique relationships, tasks, sufferings and death. Thus, meaning for an individual is special for them in their situation and cannot be appropriated by another, or reclaimed once that time and place have passed. Meaning is thus used with this unique and personal character of life in mind.

"Value" is a more general term. In effect it refers to what would be universal meanings. That is, while it is true that meaning is unique and personal to situations and persons, it is also true that there are enough similarities present in many situations to result, over time, in meanings which can apply on a more universal level. These are values.

d. Existential Vacuum. The central subject of concern in Frankl's work is the lack of a sense of meaning and purpose in life.[7] For some this sense of meaninglessness applies to life in general; they have no meaning or purpose which they are pursuing or to which they are committed. For others the experience of meaninglessness occurs in quite

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[6]Joseph B. Fabry, The Pursuit of Meaning (Boston: Beacon, 1968) p. 54.

[7]Viktor Frankl, The Unconscious God (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1973) p. 23.

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specific situations of life; death crisis, illness. In such specific circumstances people sometimes have difficulty making sense of, integrating, or finding meaning in their lives. The resulting emptiness and frustration is the focus of Frankl's concern.

Frankl believes that this emptiness arises out of the fact that our humanness demands meaning in our lives. When the search for meaning goes unsatisfied, or when it is repressed, there develops what he would call this "pathology of our age," the sense of meaninglessness.[8] He goes so far as to suggest that the satisfaction of the search for meaning can be seen as one criteria for mental health and that its absence may be an indication of emotional maladjustment.[9] In his thinking, if we really want to confront the ills and ailments of our time then we must understand this frustration, the frustration of our most basic need and motivation--what he calls the "will to meaning."

Frankl uses two expressions to talk about this lack of meaning: existential frustration and existential vacuum. Existential frustration is characterized as a sense of meaninglessness and futility about life.[10] It is reflected in a frustration that life seems to have no explanation, no meaning; "what does it all mean?" Existential vacuum follows along the same lines but simply refers to the empty feeling in a person's life where there is the feeling that there is no significant substance to life:

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[8]Ibid., p. 112. [9]Ibid., p. 84. [10]Ibid., p. 89.

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> . . .ever more patients are suffering from the lack of life content, rather than clinical symptomatology.[11]

Existential frustration and vacuum are caused by what makes us uniquely human. As described in greater depth later, Frankl centers this unique human characteristic in the capacities of self-transcendence and self-detachment. It is interesting to note at this point that because of these capacities the human being finds him/herself in an interesting situation. a) The capacity to rise above drives and instincts means we are not told by them what we must do. b) The fact that we are not determined by our setting in life suggests we are no longer bound by traditions and values which indicate what we ought to do. This is partly attributed to a more permissive society. c) No longer told what we must do nor what we ought to do, we sometimes find ourselves unsure of what we really want to do. This existential vacuum tends to result in three possibilities: a) conformism, a need to do what others do; b) totalitarianism, a need to do what others want us to do; c) noogenic neurosis, neuroses which manifest themselves as a result of the sense of emptiness. Existential vaccuum is, in itself, not neurotic, but it can result in neuroses.[12]

3. For Niebuhr.

a. The Search for "that which makes life worthwhile"

Most of Niebuhr's terms do not bear a quick definition and must

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[11]Ibid., p. 90. [12]Ibid., p. 91.

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be explored in greater depth. It will help here, however, to suggest how Frankl's search for meaning is translated into the terms of Niebuhr's theology.

It is important, as we begin, to see how the issue of meaning in life both touches a central concern for Niebuhr, and is also transformed by Niebuhr's faith approach. One recognizes the issue of Frankl's search for meaning in Niebuhr's work, although it is not specifically put in those terms. At the beginning of Radical Monotheism in Western Cultures, Niebuhr, in his discussion of faith, notes the experience and thought of Tolstoi and Royce in tones that resonate with Frankl. Niebuhr recounts Tolstoi's My Confession for example:

> At every point the question "But why?" or, as we might say, "so what?" intruded itself into Tolstoi's deliberations. Whether he thought about his estate, about the thousands of acres and hundreds of horses he owned, or about the education of his children, or about his literary activities, he always returned to the question of meaning. So what? "What if I should be more famous than Gogol, Pushkin, Shakespeare, Moliere--than all the writers of the world--well, and what then?" He felt, he wrote, that the ground on which he stood was crumbling, that what he had been living for was nothing, that he had no reason for living.
>
> "The truth was," said Tolstoi, "that life was meaningless.[13]
>
> "Faith is the knowledge of the meaning of human life, in consequence of which (man) does not destroy (himself) but lives. Faith is the force of life. If a (man) lives (he) believes in something. If (he) did not believe there was something to live for, (he) would not live.[14]

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[13]H. Richard Niebuhr, Radical Monotheism and Western Culture (New York: Harper & Row, 1960) pp. 19-20.

[14]Lyof N. Tolstoi, My Confession Chapter IX, as quoted ibid., p. 20.

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For Niebuhr, as we can see, the issue of meaning, for the Christian faith, must be considered in the context and frame-work of faith; faith as trust--dependence on a center of value from which a self "derives worth and for the sake of which it lives,"[15] and faith as fidelity--loyalty. Tolstoi for Niebuhr, beautifully illustrates a person's search for something to trust in, a value center that will truly be adequate. Royce, on the other hand, illustrates the other aspect of faith, loyalty, which parallels this search for a value center. He quotes Royce as an example of this aspect, and again, one can hear the harmony this has with the issue of meaning in Frankl:

> A loyal (man) is one who has found and who sees, neither mere individual fellowmen to be loved or hated, nor mere conventions, nor customs, nor laws to be obeyed, but some social cause or system of causes, so rich, so well-knit, and, to (him), so fascinating and withal so kindly in its appeal to (his) natural self-will, that (he) says to (his) cause: "Thy will is mine and mine is thine. In Thee I do not lose but find my self, living intensely in proportion as I live for thee.[16]

And Niebuhr would conclude:

> . . .yet it is by fidelity that they live no less than by confidence in centers of value which bestow worth on their existence. Center of value and causes may, however, be only two names for the same objective realities for which and from which selves live as valued and valuing beings.[17]

We can begin to see from this that what is "the search for meaning," and the most primary need in human life--"the will to meaning", for Frankl, can only be approached as the "search for God," and the "need for God" in Niebuhr's view:

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[15]Ibid., p. 21. [16]Ibid., pp. 21-22. [17]Ibid., p. 22.

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> . . .is the need for that which makes life worth living, which bestows meaning on life by revealing itself as the final source of life's being and value. The religious need is satisfied only in so far as (man) is able to recognize (himself) as valued by something beyond (himself).[18]

One author emphasizes this matter of the need for "that which makes life worth living" in Niebuhr's work by saying:

> Accordingly, the fundamental religious question--a question which is not merely of parochial significance but rather, basic to all human life--is "what makes life worth living?"[19]

For Niebuhr the self has a basic need for a God to worship and a cause to be loyal to.

The search for meaning is therefore primarily the search for God. The reverse of this, however, would not be true; meaning as such would then turn into a value-center, another "god":

> "Hence the important question for religion is not the question, whether a God exists, but rather, what being or beings have the value of deity. . .it is being which is sought, not value as such (emphasis mine). . .the true query of religion is, "Which among the available realities has the value of deity or has the potency of diety?" And this question turns into the query, "Which reality has those characteristics which are the foundation of the value of deity or which fulfill the human need for God?"[20]

The fidelity and loyalty to the true center of value is so important in his theology that we would be cautioned against setting up the "search for meaning" as the primary concern in order to avoid its becoming another center of value, and thereby

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[18]H. Richard Niebuhr, "Value Theory and Theology" in The Nature of Religious Experience p. 115 quoted in James W. Fowler, To See the Kingdom (New York: Abingdon, 1974) p. 170.

[19]Donald E. Fadner, The Responsible God (Missoula, MT: Scholars, 1975) p. 131.

[20]Niebuhr, "Value Theory and Theology," quoted in Paul Ramsey (ed) Faith and Ethics (New York: Harper & Row, 1977) p.72.

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falling into henotheism. As one finds in Niebuhr's writings, God is the principle of being and value, and in a sense "beyond value." "God is not a value in any system of value more inclusive than the universal system of which God is the center and principle."[21] Meaning and value are found in the context of the act of faith.

To summarize, in translating Frankl's "will to meaning," "search for meaning," into Niebuhr's terms, we would need to speak of the religious need and quest for "that which makes life worth living." For the Christian community, as Niebuhr sees it, this need and quest can only be fulfilled in radical monotheism. Radical monotheism, as we will define it in much more depth later, is faith in the "One beyond the many, in whom the many are one."[22] As we will find, through revelation, radical monotheism sets in motion a revolution, a conversion in our need and quest for meaning. It is a conversion which in itself is a process, a permanent process of conversion, which illumines the true source of all being and all value; a source which makes life sacred, worth living, valuable,meaningful. To answer the question, "how does one find meaning?" in Niebuhr's theology we must really ask "how does this process of metanoia come about?" Once that question is answered we find, again, the question is slightly altered from this perspective to be: it is not so much "how does one find meaning" as it is "in whom does one find meaning?"

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[21]Fadner, p. 165.

[22]Niebuhr, Radical Monotheism, p. 16.

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b. Value. In "The Center of Value" we find a discussion of Niebuhr's relational value theory, which he encapsulates in a primary axiom:

> "Value is present wherever one existent being with capacities and potentialities confronts another existence that limits or completes or complements it."[23]

In explaining what this means he makes several important points which I will simply enumerate with accompanying quotes and brief explanations: 1) "Value is present objectively for an observer in the fittingness or unfittingness of being to being."[24] That is, whenever a situation occurs where one existent being "meets the needs," "fits the capacity" or "corresponds to the potentialities of another," it is good, or has positive value. If in that occasion it "thwarts, destroys, or starves" another, it would have a negative value, or be evil. 2) The same principle also applies to beings in the state of becoming. That is, as one is in the "process of becoming" all that one has the potential to be, that which assists, enables, or contributes to that realization would be good. Conversely, that which "thwarts, destroys or starves" that "becoming" would be evil. 3) Objective and subjective goods are both integrally a part of the same relational process in which value is realized. The objective good for a person would be that "other" existence that complements or assists in one's realizing a potential. The subjective good would be the good for the self of realizing

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[23]Ibid., p. 103.

[24]Ibid.

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that potential. There are two relations here in which value is realized. The relation to the "other" and the relation to its own being--its internal good; two relations, yet part of the same process. A third relation would be the interaction between these two which in turn has wider implications; for the one who is complemented or completed by another becomes the possible participant in another relation in which that same one is now the complementary good for still another. Donald E. Fadner in The Responsible God puts it this way:

> The actualization of value, the realization of a being's "subjective good" in any moment is a "response" to another being, which being, therefore is necessary to and has "complementary value" for this particular act of becoming. Moreover this actualized good, what a being actually comes to be in its response to the other, becomes available as a complementary good for future acts of becoming.[25]

4) This is all within the ever extending network of relations in society. Assumed in what has just been said is that in his relational value theory there is the basic understanding that the self is always a "social self." To be "good" in terms of relational value theory it must be good not only for the self but more importantly for others. As he points out,

> Relational value theory can not be utilitarian in the sense that it posits a being with its own survival or self-realization in view as its end, a being which thereupon uses a means to the end, the complementary goods of environing beings. It must do justice to the fact that value is not dependent on a conscious finalism for which some goods may be designated as intrinsic goods, others as instrumental.[26]

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[25]Fadner, p. 125.

[26]Niebuhr, Radical Monotheism, p. 104.

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5) Relational value theory holds together being and value. Value does not exist in and of itself, but occurs in the relation of being to being:

> For if anything existed simply in itself and by itself, value would not be present. Value is the good-for-ness of being for being in their reciprocity, their animosity, and their mutual aid. Value cannot be defined or intuited in itself for it has no existence in itself; and nothing is valuable in itself, but everything has value, positive or negative, in its relations. Thus value is not a relation but arises in the relations of being to being.[27]

6) Relational value theory suggests a relation between the "right" and the "good" which maintains the integirty of both while also showing them to be interrelated. When beings complement one another in their "becoming," that relation is known as "right"--it is a good-for-each-other. They complement and contribute to realizing each other's potential. At the same time those right relations are "not merely a means to the good; it is the goodness of relations in action." The good, in other words cannot simply be a utilitarian relation for one's own ends. It must be and include a good-for-others dimension in order to also be "right".

Niebuhr admits that relational value theory is vulnerable to questions of truth because it is so relativistic. Since value is found in-relation-to something, one must establish what that "something" will be and then construct a consistent "system of value judgements and determinations of what is right."[28] He points out that historically several such value centers have been chosen and shown to have pitfalls:

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[27]Ibid., p. 107. [28]Ibid., p. 109.

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--What is good for humanity, or society; in which case some general definition of what it is to be basically human, or what the definition of society is has to be set and sometimes this is set too narrowly. --Sometimes the individual person has been made the center (what is good for the individual person is all important), ignoring another value center, society. --Sometimes the society has been made center of value (placing its needs first) and ignoring another value center, the individual. Here the distinction is between society and individual as competing value centers. Sometimes life itself has become the value center (evolutionary ethics). It should also be stated, however, that within each of these relative systems, once a value center has been chosen, the good and the right can be objectively established. It isn't just a matter of one's feelings or desires within that system:

> Yet none of these relative systems is relativistic in the sense of being dependent on feeling or desire; each can be objective in the sense that it may be a system dealing with actual value relations and in the sense that the value judgments made within that frame of reference are subject to critical inquiry into their truth or falsity.[29]

The problem then is not so much with relational value theory being unable to deliver objective truth. The problem, for Niebuhr, is that so often value centers are chosen that are relative; taking some finite reality and absolutizing it. In fact, sometimes several centers are chosen, a kind of polytheism. This brings us then to a consideration of relational value theory and monotheism. Monotheism would establish

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[29]Ibid., p. 110.

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one absolute, ultimate value center. It would also recognize that within that one ultimate value center there may be many relative value centers and value systems. None of these may be ultimate, but, within each relative value good and right can be objectively determined. Niebuhr then postulates that relational value theory is most appropriate to Jewish and Christian theology because:

> Its relativism, when recognized, agrees with their concern that relative things should be kept relative and never confused with the transcendent absolute. Its realism, that is, its solid founding on the nature of being, agrees with their conviction that the starting point of all inquiry lies in the recognition of that which is. . .[30]

This fits for monotheism whose:

> . . .starting point, its dogmatic beginning, is the transcendent one for whom alone there is an ultimate good and for whom, as the source and end of all things, whatever is, is good.[31]

c. Ethics. To say briefly first what it is not, ethics, for Niebuhr is not a prescription of moral life, in universal or particular situations, dictated by an ethicist. It is not an apologetic task of explaining or demonstrating the superiority of the morals of the Christian community. In fact, thirdly, ethical discussion is not to be confined to the Christian life alone.

To say what ethics is for Niebuhr, we can begin with saying that the work of ethics comes before any system of do's and don'ts, or any constructing of a system of norms. As Gustafson has suggested, "His task is to analyze 'ethos'

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[30]Ibid., p. 111. [31]Ibid., p. 112.

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to lay bare the roots and fundamental character of a community's moral life."[32] Ethics ". . .has the task of disclosing the basic pattern. . .the way of thinking and acting that is true of its character as (men) before God."[33] What ought to be done in specific situations evolves out of a community involved in this process. Secondly, the fact that he is not interested in bolstering claims for "Christian" ethics, arises from his belief that "Christian affirmations should be understood as the confession of how that which is in itself absolute has been experienced from a conditioned and relative perspective."[34] His belief is that the approach of Christian ethics, of the community, should be one of repentance and criticism of its moral action--not pride. Thirdly, Niebuhr does not want to be restricted to "Christian" ethics (i.e. the Christian life from a Christian perspective). He moves to a broader philosophical concern for the human moral life in general, phenomenologically, which he would like to bring into dialogue with his understanding of the Christian perspective. Finally, Niebuhr would embrace the traditional twofold goal of ethics; knowledge of the self and guidance in the activities of decision, choice, and commitment.

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[32]James Gustafson in H. Richard Niebuhr, The Responsible Self (New York: Harper & Row, 1963) p. 13.

[33]Ibid., p. 8.

[34]John B. Cobb, Jr., Living Options in Protestant Theology (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1962) p. 285.

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D. SCOPE AND LIMITATIONS

There are certain limitations imposed by Frankl and Niebuhr which should be noted as presuppositions of this study.

1. Niebuhr

In Niebuhr's case we must approach the issue of the quest for "that which makes life worthwhile," from a "confessional stance." Niebuhr's own confessional approach would suggest that we can not prescribe what this search involves for all persons, times, and places, or what answers may finally be given. However, we can analyze what that search means for those who participate in the Christian faith; attempting to be true to its basic understanding and revelation. We must recognize that we can make no universal claim, however, and that our "assertions may only be meaningful to those who look from our vantage points." That is not to say that what is seen may not be real and reflective of what is truly universal, but only to admit that our view of that reality is limited. This study, then, will seek to analyze what the "Christian" search for meaning would involve from the perspective of H. Richard Niebuhr.

2. Frankl

In Frankl's case an important limitation is imposed. This becomes clear in his discussions of the distinction between priest and psychiatrist. In the following statement he suggests a relationship should exist between them, but one of

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mutual respect and mutual acknowledgment of their respective limitations. It also seeks to demarcate areas of professional responsibility:

> Once the existential vacuum has eventuated in a noogenic neurosis it goes without saying that its treatment is reserved to the medical profession. In my home country, and in many countries, psychotherapy must not be practiced by anyone who is not a doctor of medicine. Of course, this legislation also holds for logotherapy. On the other hand, it is understandable that those aspects of logotherapy which are not connected with the treatment of a disease, be it a noogenic, psychogenic, or somatogenic neurosis, are accessible to the other counseling professions as well. There is no reason why the clinical psychologist, the social worker, the pastor, the priest and rabbi should not offer advice and assistance to people who are seeking a meaning of life or questioning the meaning of life: in other words, the people in the grip of the existential vacuum.[35]

In explaining the implications of this passage we might begin by saying that Frankl raises a concern that the relationship between ministry and psychiatry has not been clear and has given rise to a professional malpractice of sorts:

> There are too many psychiatrists dabbling in the field of theology and too many theologians dabbling in the field of psychiatry.[36]

He warns both that he sees them as having different goals and functions. For therapy the goal is mental health, for religion the goal is salvation. As Tweedie puts it:

> The minister and the therapist have two different vocational tasks. Frankl maintains that the psychotherapist is dedicated to the "healing of the soul" while the minister is assigned to the "saving of the soul."[37]

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[35]Viktor Frankl, The Will to Meaning (New York: New American Library, 1969) p. 90.

[36]Ibid., p. 142.

[37]Donald F. Tweedie, Jr., Logotherapy (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1961) p. 149

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Frankl is also concerned that Logotherapy remain free from dependence upon a given theological position. He does not want people to get the idea worship is primarily to "obtain good mental health."[38] Nor does he want logotherapy to become a religious treatment that would by definition remove it from use by agnostic or atheist, or by those who do not share certain beliefs. He wants Logotherapy to be neutral "on specific religious commitments."[39] He does not want meanings or values imposed upon the patient.

> Logotherapy does not cross the boundary between psychotherapy and religion. But it leaves it to the patient whether or not to pass the door. It is the patient who has to decide whether he interprets responsibleness in terms of being responsible to humanity, society, conscience, or God.[40]

The realm in which the minister does rightfully "offer advice and assistance" is in the situation where persons are struggling with meaning in life. This is not in itself pathological, but is rather an achievement unique to being human: "It (existential vacuum) is something sociogenic and not at all a neurosis. . .It is a human achievement."[41] Indeed sometimes the existential vacuum does result in pathology. The minister's work is understood as intervention before this develops into neurosis. Frankl would call such intervention a kind of psychotherapeutic "first aid."

This study and its practical application in the parish will respect these distinctions in the sense that the small

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[38] Ibid. [39] Ibid., p. 150.

[40] Frankl, Will to Meaning, p. 143.

[41] Frankl, Unconscious God, p. 139.

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group experience will be designed for relatively healthy persons who can handle a group setting and who do not have pathological disorders or problems that would be disruptive to the growth of others in the group. The project will not be aimed at pathological problems (in the limited sense that Frankl would suggest) but rather at issues raised by the search for meaning in the context of faith. Confessionally speaking, however, to suggest that some elements of psychotherapy are not a necessary and appropriate dimension of ministry seems both unfair and unrealistic in the diverse setting of the local parish where the minister must respond to all kinds of situations. At the same time, it is also true that ministers are not licensed psychotherapists and should not pretend to be. It is important to know and respect one's professional limitations of training and background, and to make the necessary referrals. In the context of this project and its application it is probably safe to say that in such a group setting psychotherapy, at some level, is taking place.

3. Integration

The integration of Frankl and Niebuhr will be done as a small group study design which is the product of two different applications in local church settings. The leaders' guide represents learnings from these sessions and reflects the collective experience and input of those who shared in those groups. The design was used in small churches where the groups did not number over twelve persons, and averaged approximately eight per session.

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Chapter II

VIKTOR FRANKL

This chapter will explore Viktor Frankl's theory of the search for meaning. It will begin by examining the roots of the search for meaning in the freedom of the will and in what Frankl calls the "will to meaning." With this ground work the discussion will move to a consideration of value and the discovery and realization of meaning.

A. THE ROOTS OF THE SEARCH FOR MEANING

A starting place for understanding Frankl's work is his concept of the human self. It is the nature of the human self which makes "meaning" the fundamental and most essential issue in human life. Two characteristics of human nature are the foci of his attention: 1) freedom of the will, and 2) the will to meaning. Discussion of each follows:

1. Freedom of the Will

The freedom of the will is one foundation stone of Frankl's concept of the human being. It is Frankl's concern to protect against any therapeutic approach which devaluates, hence dehumanizes the individual. In the context of our discussion of the freedom of the will, such a dehumanizing approach would be determinism; that is, an approach to the individual which

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suggests s/he is wholly determined by psychological instincts or drives, or determined by physical or social conditions. He is quick to qualify this by stating that he does not intend to suggest that the human is free from psychological, biological and social conditions. What he does want to preserve, however, is the freedom to step back and take a stand toward those conditions:

> (Man's) freedom is no freedom from conditions but rather the freedom to take a stand on whatever conditions might confront (him).[1]

With the freedom of the will firmly established in the very nature of humankind, Frankl can then contend that the human being is also responsible for what kind of stand is taken towards those conditions, what kind of character one actualizes, and therefore is ultimately capable of discovering and fulfilling meaning in all conditions. Because we are free, we are theoretically capable of responsibleness.

a. Capacity for Self-detachment. Frankl bases the freedom of the will upon his experience of the human capacity of "self-detachment" in the Concentration Camp. There he witnessed persons who, despite the horrible conditions, were able to detach themselves from those conditions in ways that manifested heroism and humor. His observation of the capacity to be "free" of the most drastic physical and psychological conditions that might "determine" the character, attitudes, and behavior of individuals gave rise to his contention that

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[1]Viktor Frankl, The Will to Meaning (New York: New American Library, 1969) p. 16.

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such a capacity for self-detachment was an important part of human nature and clearly demonstrated the freedom of the human will. For Frankl the human will is free to be responsible for attitudes, and for responses to one's psycho-somatic condition in the world. He sees this as a uniquely human capacity.

The conclusion drawn from the observation of the capacity of self-detachment is that if we can rise above our psychic and somatic dimensions, then there must be another dimension of the human self which makes this possible. This dimension Frankl calls the noological dimension. This dimension is entered into when one stands back and reflects upon, examines, or in any other way makes oneself an object to be considered and of which to be conscious. It is the uniquely human dimension which makes self-detachment possible. This is to be sharply distinguished from the psychological and biological dimensions. Again, the dimension which makes the capacity of self-detachment possible also makes freedom and responsibility possible. It is this dimension which for him most clearly describes the source of the "humanness" of the human being, which is the source of responsibility and, ultimately, of the discovery of meaning. This dimension deserves a more thorough explanation at this point.

b. The Noological Dimension. For Freud the important question was that of the conscious and unconscious aspects of the person. The unconscious contained any repressed drives, instincts and impulses which were relegated there by the ego to guard against their immature and undisciplined nature.

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The task was to reclaim these repressed impulses. Thus we see that the movement from the conscious to the unconscious was quite active, and the interpenetration from one to the other quite possible, even frequent. Frankl suggests, however, that the real question is whether something arises from the psychological-biological dimension, or from the noological dimension. Here there is absolutely no interpenetration. What is truly human, authentic to one's humanness, comes only from the spiritual dimension. To be "human" is not to be determined by the psychological-biological dimensions, but rather to choose, to be responsible for one's self and situation: ". . .being human is being responsible--existentially responsible, responsible for one's own existence."[2] "Authentic existence is present where a self is deciding for (himself), but not where an id is driving (him)".[3] For Frankl the gulf between the spiritual and instinctual is absolute.

Frankl goes further to speak of the division as: "an ontological hiatus which separates the two fundamentally distinct regions within the total structure of the human being."[4] Thus the chasm is drawn even deeper between them; one being essence, the other being merely substance--or "facticity" as he refers to it. Again, the distinction between psychic and somatic phenomena is unclear. However, what is clear for Frankl is the distinction between spiritual and the psycho-

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[2]Viktor Frankl, The Unconscious God (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1973) p. 26.

[3]Ibid., p. 27. [4]Ibid.

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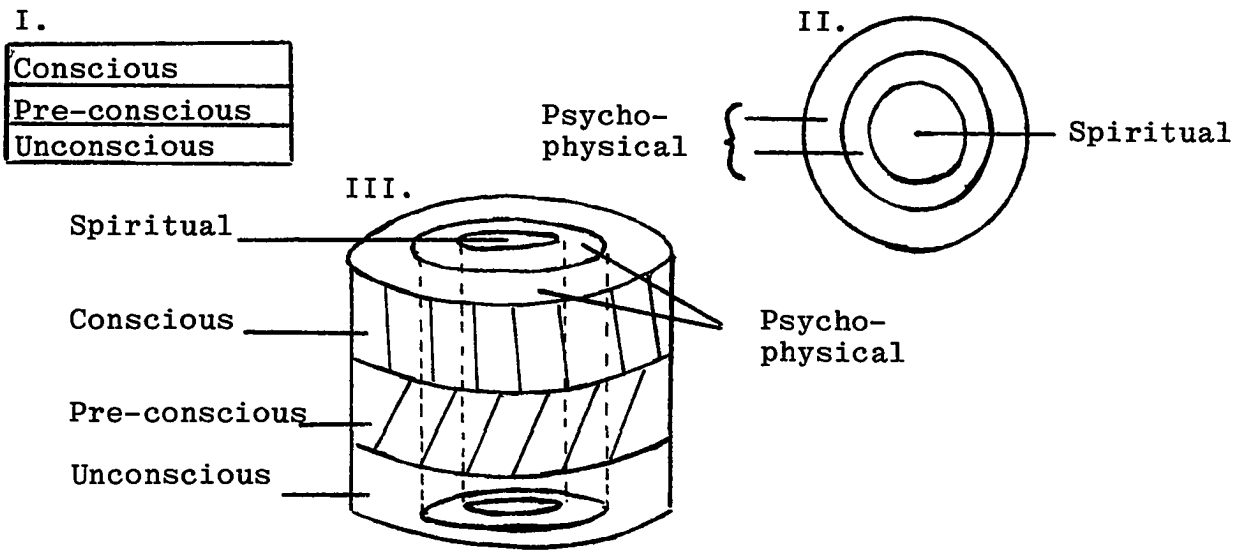
physical. The importance of the distinction can be seen therapeutically where the therapist seeks to mobilize the spiritual (freedom and responsibility) in order to combat the deterministic influence of the psycho-physical; against the idea that "this is the way I am, this is the way I have to be."[5]

A major concern for Frankl is that the human person not be misinterpreted from only one or two dimensions (especially from one of the two lesser dimensions). For this reason he goes to some length to construct diagrams of how to think of these dimensions. He suggests three models which progressively represent a truer picture of human wholeness.[6]



[5]Joseph B. Fabry, The Pursuit of Meaning (Missoula, MT: Beacon, 1968) p. 20.

[6]Frankl, Unconscious God, p. 29.

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The first model is obviously rejected by Frankl as being totally inadequate; it misses the other most important dimension of the human being. The second model is a considerable improvement. The suggestion is that the "who" that the person is, the spiritual center, is surrounded by the psycho-physical layers. As Frankl puts it ". . .the person 'has' a psychophysical overlay, whereas the person "is" spiritual."[7] Furthermore, it is only when these "layers" are centered around this spiritual center, that integration and wholeness can be spoken of. Wholeness involves not only a unity of the psychophysical, but the integration of all three dimensions, with the spiritual as the centering, unifying integrating essence of human personhood. This model is attributed to Max Scheler.[8]

The final model is considered to be even more comprehensive in depicting the structure of these dimensions. It shows the spiritual center to be like the inner core of a paper towel roll, with its psycho-physical layers wrapped around it. The core and its layers then extend through the levels of conscious, preconscious and unconscious. Phenomena arising from both the spiritual and psychophysical dimensions, then, can be conscious, preconscious, or unconscious. This leads to Frankl's assertion that there is a spiritual unconscious. Freud recognized the instinctual nature of the unconscious. Frankl wants to broaden that concept to include a spiritual unconscious. Thus, material in the unconscious may have a spiritual or psychophysical source just as may the

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[7]Ibid., p. 28. [8]Ibid.

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material in the conscious. In consciousness responsibleness was noted as being the child of the spiritual dimension, so too, therefore, in the unconscious. Responsibleness, as one aspect of the spiritual, can have and does have unconscious aspects.

The reasoning which lies behind this model and its conclusion about responsibleness is that there are aspects of the human self, of human existence, which are only conscious in so far as they are expressed in human encounter, or in human action. They are elusive to conscious reflection. These are what could be called "foundational attributes" of human existence. These appear as simple "givens" which cannot be reduced in origin to other phenomena or antecedents. For example, the self is elusive in that it cannot fully be made an object of reflection. That which is reflected upon is never totally that which is doing the reflecting. The self, then, is, in its origin, unconscious. That which is uniquely "human," therefore, spiritual activity (as that which is only human to some extent through active expression), is essentially unconscious. Frankl concludes that consciousness and responsibleness are two basic aspects of human existence which are foundational, unanalyzable, irreducible. Again, he appeals to the ontological dimension to explain what he feels psychology can not explain. They simply <u>are</u>. As a counterpart of depth psychology, therefore, Frankl would assert that at its "depth" the core of a person, the spiritual self, is an ontological fact of existence, irreducible, and unconscious in its

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origin, so also responsibleness, which is a basic aspect of the spiritual self.[9]

2. The Will to Meaning

a. Capacity for self-transcendence. Another foundation stone of Frankl's concept of the human being is the will to meaning: "What I call the will to meaning could be defined as the basic striving of (man) to find and fulfill meaning and purpose."[10] The will to meaning is best understood in the context of the uniquely human capacity of "self-transcendence." As opposed to the animals, which are bound by their environment and the instincts which respond to that environment, the human has the unique characteristic of self-transcendence. To distinguish this from the previously discussed "self-detachment," perhaps we could say that self-detachment is the ability to step back from one's psychophysical condition, whereas self-transcendence has the meaning of transcending oneself toward other beings or toward meaning. Frankl puts forth his understanding of this uniquely human capacity concisely and beautifully when he says:

> Thus, human existence--at least as long as it has not been neurotically distorted--is always directed to something, or someone, other than itself--be it a meaning to fulfill, or another human being to encounter lovingly.[11]

Herein are contained the two aspects of the capacity for self-transcendence: the reaching out toward another being,

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[9]Ibid., p. 31.

[10]Frankl, Will to Meaning, p. 35.

[11]Frankl, Unconscious God, p. 78.

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and the reaching toward a meaning to fulfill. The first finds expression in human love and friendship (which he vehemently defends as more than merely the sublimation of the Id), and the second is manifested in what we know to be conscience which distinguishes and discerns the responsible action to be taken and thus is instrumental for discovery and fulfillment of meaning (again, he argues, conscience can not be explained as mere superego in that at times it opposes the standards set forth by the superego).

The will to meaning, therefore, arises out of the distinctly human capacity of self-transcendence and consists of a basic striving toward meaning. What is most basic to humanity, to being human, is not motivation of instincts and drives, but rather the motivation of the will to meaning. As we have seen in these discussions, self-detachment and self-transcendence are two basic human capacities out of which come two pillars of his thought: freedom of the will, and the will to meaning, respectively.

b. Contrasting Motivational Theories. Frankl goes to some length in his writings to contrast the will to meaning and other motivational theories which he views as dehumanizing and reductionistic. The three theories he contrasts are Freud's pleasure principle or homeostatic principle, Adler's status principle, and Maslow's principle of self-actualization. Frankl defends his "will to meaning" against each of these. He contends that the pleasure, power, and self-actualization motivations are not the goals in and of themselves, but are

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always the by-products of, or the means to, the more fundamental striving for meaning. We will review his discussion of each of these.

Freud's motivation theory holds that the individual is motivated by the need to lower inner tension, to maintain "an inner equilibrium which is called 'homeostasis.'"[12] In other words, all human activity is motivated by an attempt to reduce tension, to reduce unpleasant sensations, to satisfy needs, drives, and instincts. In Frankl's argument against such a motivation theory he notes specialists in the fields of neurology, biology, and psychology which I will note briefly:[13] 1) He notes Bertalanffy's findings that homeostasis is inadequate for explaining such basic biologial processes as growth and reproduction. 2) He notes Goldstein's work showing that attempts in an individual to avoid all tension are the results of a brain pathology. 3) He notes Allport's suggestion that healthy striving by an individual actually resists equilibrium. He also cites Maslow and Buhler whose work would be consistent with Allport's view.

Frankl also suggests that such an approach to human motivation is dehumanizing. It results in the "leveling of all potential human aims," it "devaluates every genuine moral impulse in (man.")[14] It belittles acts of human kindness,

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[12]Ibid., p. 77.

[13]Frankl, Will to Meaning, p. 32.

[14]Viktor Frankl, The Doctor and the Soul (New York: Vintage, 1955) p. 36.

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valor, aesthetic appreciation, and love by reducing them to mere homeostatic satisfaction.

Finally, Frankl argues that the pleasure principle can not stand as a goal in its own right:

> Normally pleasure is never the goal of human strivings but rather is, and must remain, an effect, more specifically, the side effect of attaining a goal. Attaining the goal constitutes a reason for being happy. . .
>
> But even more, one can not pursue it. To the extent to which one makes happiness the objective of (his) motivation, (he) necessarily makes it the object of (his) attention. But precisely by so doing (he) loses sight of the reason for happiness, and happiness itself must fade away.[15]

Adler's motivation theory suggests that the individual is motivated by the need and desire to attain status. Frankl dismisses this motivation theory forthrightly as being a "parallel" to the will to pleasure. He argues that such a motivation is self-defeating. The individual motivated by the will to attain status (power) will be successful in that pursuit only until this motivation is recognized by others as an end in itself. Status is normally granted not to such as these, he argues, but to those engaged in a genuine effort to fulfill their meaning. As a by-product of this effort an individual receives acceptance, respect, and acclaim. If it is an end in itself, these will be withheld by people (It is important to remember that Frankl would see the pursuit of pleasure, power, and self-actualization, as ends in themselves, to be neurotic distortions. Thus, while there certainly are those who pursue and achieve status and power for their own

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[15]Frankl, Will to Meaning, p. 34.

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sake, who may not be rejected as status-seekers, for whom status and power are not by-products of meaningful activity, Frankl would understand this not to be healthy and not to be what is most basic to being "human". For him these would represent the reductionistic extreme which such motivation theories encourage). Frankl also argues that power should rather be seen as the means to an end. If it becomes an end in itself it distorts the true goal toward which it is directed.[16] Finally, the arguments used against the pleasure principle in regards to its devaluation of human motivation would apply here as well. He would oppose any suggestion that we should view all human activity as merely the result of striving for status and power. To him this is a dehumanizing picture of the human being, and has its effect on people whose behaviors are explained by such an interpretation.

As we turn to Maslow's motivation theory of self-actualization, we find Frankl's arguments following the same lines. The individual discovers, fulfills, actualizes the fullness of personhood and potential not as these are pursued in and of themselves. Rather, they are realized in the process of pursuing a greater and more inclusive goal. Frankl uses Maslow's own words to support his viewpoint: "Or, as Abraham Maslow put it, the 'business of self-actualization' can best be carried out 'via a commitment to an important job.'"[17] Frankl contends that in actual fact the pursuit of

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[16]Ibid., p. 35.

[17]Frankl, Unconscious God, p. 78.

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self-actualization is a distortion of the true human striving for meaning. That is, it occurs as an end in itself when the pursuit of meaning (of that "important job," or mission, or task) is not pursued and fulfilled. He uses the imagery of a boomerang that is thrown out by a hunter and returns only if it does not find its mark: (Man,) too, returns to (himself) only if (he) has missed (his) mission."[18] Finally, Frankl contends that the pursuit of self-actualization somehow fails to realize an individual's full humanness. A short quote is sufficient here to suggest the contrast between the "search for meaning" and the "search for oneself":

> The more one forgets oneself--giving oneself to a cause or another person--the more human (he) is. And the more one is immersed and absorbed in something or someone other than oneself the more (he) really becomes (himself).[19]

Having considered his understanding of the uniquely human capacity of self-transcendence, it is clear that the pursuit of meaning is, for him, the only truly human motivation.

To sum up, Frankl would suggest that a proper approach to human motivation is one which sees these other motivational theories in the context of the more inclusive "will to meaning". When the pursuit of meaning, the fulfillment of one's meaning, remains the primary concern (remembering that such meaning is self-transcending), then pleasure, happiness, status, power, peak experience, self-actualization (or whatever lesser goal), if and when attained, will be a natural result.

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[18]Frankl, Will to Meaning, p. 38.

[19]Frankl, Unconscious God, p. 79.

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c. Not a "Drive". Before leaving the discussion of the will to meaning, it is important to note that Frankl would want to be clear that he does not want this concept to be interpreted so that the "will to meaning" is synonymous with the "drive to meaning". He sees a significant difference between these two. First of all, if it is a "drive" then the human is again reduced in her or his activities to being seen as merely satisfying the principle of homeostasis. We have already well considered why he considers this to be dehumanizing. Secondly, the description of this motivation, this striving, as a "drive" is inaccurate. The difference, existentially, between being "driven to" something as opposed to being pulled by meaning, he argues, is a vast one. Such an interpretation of the will to meaning as a drive further suggests that there is no freedom to choose. As he puts it: "meaning fulfillment always implies decision making".[20] He adds a final caution to all of this by stating that he does not intend the result of his assertions about the freedom of the will and the will to meaning to be a "relapse into preaching will power". For him we do not will the will to meaning. It is mobilized only as meaning itself is discovered.[21]

B. MEANING IN LIFE

Having examined the roots of the search for meaning in the unique human capacity of self-detachment (making possible

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[20]Frankl, Will to Meaning, p. 43.

[21]Ibid., p. 44.

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the freedom of the will) and in the capacity of self-transcendence (issuing in the will to meaning), the way is laid clear to discuss Frankl's approach to, and understanding of, "meaning". In effect we are moving into what he calls the third pillar of his theory: the assertion of meaning in life.

1. Assumptions

a. Overmeaning: Scope of Inquiry and Therapeutic Value. Frankl begins by making clear that he does not intend to consider the problem of the meaning and purpose of the world as a whole. In his mind this kind of question belongs in discussions of religion. Nevertheless he does suggest that attempts to grasp the meaning of the whole are beyond us. At best we might understand it "in the form of a super-meaning, using the word to convey the idea that the meaning of the whole is no longer comprehensible and goes beyond the comprehensible."[22] Beyond this we really can not grasp the meaning and purpose of the whole universe. He uses the analogy that the animal world is unable to grasp the purposes of a super world beyond it (he does not so much wish to defend the existence of such a "world," or meaning, as he does wish to hold open its possibility of existence). What is significant for him is the tremendous difference, therapeutically, that such a belief seems to make: (it is interesting that Clinbell translates super-meaning as "overmeaning", which may better

[22]Frankl, Doctor and the Soul, p. 31.

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relate Frankl's meaning)[23]

> Belief in a super-meaning--whether as a metaphysical concept or in the religious sense of Providence--is of the foremost psychotherapeutic and psychohygenic importance. As a genuine faith springing from inner strength, such a belief adds immeasurably to human vitality. To such a faith there is ultimately nothing that is meaningless.[24]

By this he means that such a belief is of great importance in helping persons cope with the perplexities of life, as well as encouraging persons to live life to the fullest.

Having mentioned the possibility and the potential worth of belief in such an "overmeaning" of the universe as a whole, Frankl makes clear that this will not be a subject of his discussions. For him we can approach meaning only in the particular, not in the general.

b. Objectivity. Frankl asserts that meaning and value exist as objective realities. This means that what is considered important and beautiful, of meaning and value, to us is not simply determined and dictated to us by psychological needs, desires and unconscious motivations. While these may indeed exist, while certain subjective states are necessary in order to see certain meanings, as well as a state of receptivity in order to comprehend them, these do not discount the fact that there are meanings and values which also exist objectively. This again is a refutation of motivational theory that attributes all values and meanings to the results of instinctual dynamics in the individual. As he puts it:

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[23]Howard J. Clinebell, Jr., Contemporary Growth Therapies (Nashville: Abingdon, 1981) p. 108.

[24]Frankl, Doctor and the Soul, p. 33.

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> According to one definition, meanings and values are nothing but reaction formations and defense mechanisms. As for myself, I would not be willing to live for the sake of my reaction formations, even less to die for the sake of my defense mechanisms.[25]

c. Uniqueness. Frankl argues for the "uniqueness" of meanings. For him "relative" is a word that is ambiguous in this context. Indeed meanings are relative, but only in the sense that they relate to a specific individual in a specific time and place. They vary from individual to individual from moment to moment given the iniqueness of an individual's life situation. No one's existence is identical to another's, no one's meaning is identical. Also, "relative" has the connotation of "subjective" and not absolute. For Frankl meanings are not relative in this sense. The only thing that is subjective and less than absolute is our perspective. His example is that while all of us see an object from our own unique perspective, this does not deny the objectivity and reality of the object in our existence. It is not a mere subjective projection. This holds true for meanings and values and therefore he suggests that there is an objectively correct approach to take in a given situation.

> The world of values is therefore seen from the perspective of the individual, but for any given situation there is only one single perspective which is the appropriate one. Accordingly, absolute rightness exists not in spite of, but because of the relativity of individual perspectives.[26]

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[25]Frankl, Will to Meaning, p. 54.

[26]Frankl, Doctor and the Soul, p. 42.

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d. Values: Shared Meanings. It is important to note that values are simply meanings that are shared to the degree that there are human situations which have something in common; meanings that relate to the human condition. As he states it: "so that we may define values as those meaning universals which crystalize in the typical situations a society or even humanity has to face."[27] This does not mean that because there are universal meanings we are spared from having to make decisions and from the search for individual meaning. There is still the task of "valuing," choosing one value over another. Moral and ethical traditions and standards have a hierarchy of values, but still the individual must decide and put these to the test of his conscience in individual situations. A quote from Frankl will serve to sum up these paragraphs relating to the objectivity of meaning:

> Human beings are transcending themselves toward meanings which are something other than themselves, which are more than mere expressions of their selves, more than mere projections of these selves. Meanings are discovered, not invented.[28]

2. Discovery and Realization of Meaning

This leads us, finally, to the definition of what Frankl means by "meaning". He defines this as: "Meaning is what is meant, be it by a person who asks me a question, or by a situation which, too, implies a question and calls for an answer. I must try hard to find out the true meaning of

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[27]Frankl, Will to Meaning, p. 56.

[28]Ibid., p. 60.

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the question which I am asked."[29] Indeed, I believe we would be justified in saying that, for Frankl, the most accurate, the most truly human view of the individual is as a being who is the "answerer" of the questions with which people and life confront him or her. This is most clearly stated in his Man's Search for Meaning when he says:

> Ultimately, (man) should not ask what the meaning of (his) life is, but rather must recognize that it is (he) who is asked. In a word, each (man) is questioned by life; and (he) can only answer to life by answering for (his) own life; to life (he) can only respond by being responsible. Thus, Logotherapy sees in responsibleness the very essence of human existence.[30]

Responsibility then becomes a major concern for Frankl in the search for meaning. The individual, when exercising his or her true humanity is making a decision or taking an action which forms a response to his or her life situation: "(Man) is responsible for giving the right answer to a question, for finding the true meaning of a situation."[31] Being responsible in a given situation and finding one's meaning in a situation are one and the same. Frankl, further, refers to the concepts of Gestalt to suggest how the fulfilling of meaning calls for a singular response of a unique individual in a unique situation. He quotes Wertheimer:

> The situation, seven plus seven equals. . .is a system with a lacuan, a gap. It is possible to fill the gap in various ways. The one completion--fourteen--corresponds to the situation, fits the gap, is structurally demanded

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[29]Ibid., p. 62.

[30]Viktor Frankl, Mans Search for Meaning (New York: Washington Square, 1959) p. 172.

[31]Frankl, Will to Meaning, p. 62.

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> in the system, in this place, with its function in the whole. It does justice to the situation. Other completions, such as fifteen, do not fit. They are not the right ones. We have here the concepts of the demands of the situation; the 'requiredness'. 'Requirements' of such an order are objective qualities.[32]

Meaning is found and fulfilled as the individual takes responsibility for making the decision, or taking that action that makes the necessary, the "required," connection in the situation.

a. Role of Conscience. Conscience becomes of particular importance at this point for conscience is understood by Frankl to guide the search for meaning. It helps the individual to discern what the "fitting response" (to use Niebuhr's terms) might be when a situation presents itself and one must discover how to answer the questions it poses. A detailed discussion of individual conscience will be helpful for better understanding its role in the search for meaning.

Referring back to our discussion of self-transcendence, we recall that this is a capacity to orient oneself outward toward meaning or toward another person. An important manifestation of this capacity is conscience. Frankl suggests that one is responsible first to one's conscience.[33] He also speaks of responsibility as "decision making under the guidance of conscience."[34]

Conscience, like responsibleness, is one of those foundational, irreducible aspects of human existence. It too

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[32]Ibid., p. 63. [33]Frankl, Doctor and the Soul, p. xx.

[34]Frankl, Will to Meaning, p. 65.

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is rooted in the unconscious. It is of course free from determining (conditioning) factors, and is not to be identified with superego, since it can contradict the very norms and morality which the superego is thought of as protecting.[35] Conscience is, in fact, pre-moral, pre-logical, and does not function along strict rational lines. He speaks of it as an intuitive sense of what ought to be, regardless of what is presently the reality of the situation. It does not depend upon any system of morals in that it precedes them, as well as any system of logic. It is that which sees possibilities; what "could be."

Conscience serves the purpose of offering what no "system" can offer. No law can encompass the "ought" for all situations. The individual situation demands sometimes more, sometimes less, than what any system can outline. Conscience perceives the "one thing that is required" for a specific person and situation.[36] The "unique necessity" does not come from rational processes, but is intuitively arrived at. With such an intuitive emphasis, Frankl wants to distinguish conscience from what might be seen as instinct. Biological instincts work only for the general good of the species and may be totally inadequate, even harmful, for specific cases. This is analogous to general moral precepts which in individual cases may not be helpful. "Ethical instinct," as he cautiously refers to it, on the contrary, intuits the "one thing needed"

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[35]Ibid., p. 19.

[36]Frankl, Unconscious God, p. 35.

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for the individual case. It can work around or adjust generally accepted patterns to meet the demands of the situation. Conscience then not only sees possibilities in the present for what ought to be, but also discerns this "oughtness" with a quality of uniqueness for the unique person and situation. In relation to responsibleness we might say that if responsibleness is the capacity to choose and make decisions, conscience provides the basis upon which those choices and decisions are made.

As to the origin of conscience, Frankl's writings would seem to contradict one another. In the Will to Meaning, he asserts that conscience must be considered limited in nature and, in fact, may lead us astray. Conscience is something to which we must give unconditional obedience, yet realize with a sense of humility that it may be in error:

> But we must add that it is also "just" a human phenomenon. It is subject to the human condition in that it is stamped by the finiteness of (man).[37]

However, in the Unconscious God he would seem to argue that to understand conscience simply as a "human phenomenon" (as opposed to transcendent) is insufficient. He would argue in fact for "the transcendent quality of conscience."[38]

As incongruous as these two arguments seem, it may be that he would argue that they are both true and in fact qualify each other. To begin with Frankl would want to free conscience from any conditioning, determining factors. Conscience is not

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[37]Frankl, Will to Meaning, p. 65.

[38]Frankl, Unconscious God, p. 52 ff.

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merely the superego; the result of introjected parental images and standards. The conscience is not determined by instincts or drives. He argues that, in fact, there can be no adequate understanding of conscience in merely psychological terms, but only in terms of ontology. Its origin can be found only in transcendence. Furthermore, conscience needs a "to what" which lies beyond itself. If the "to what", of the conscience, is merely one's ownself, then one cannot really be in dialogue with one's conscience but only in monologue. Are we merely overhearing our own voice in what is spoken of as "the voice of conscience?", or is conscience, in fact, the voice of transcendence? Frankl would hold that it is and that conscience refers to something beyond itself (It should be noted that Frankl draws back from labeling this transcendence "God," which conscience mediates). One way for Frankl to bring such an argument together with the previous one would be first to suggest that this transcendent quality is the reason that conscience commands obedience; we are responsible first and foremost to our conscience. His previous statements, therefore, would be an important qualification of this by suggesting that the human context of the conscience does necessitate some caution and humility about claiming any absolute truth for that which conscience mediates.

In a real sense, then, responsibleness may be considered rooted in or, perhaps more accurately, rooted "to" conscience in that responsibleness is meaningless without an understanding of the "to what" it is responsible. Responsibleness is subsequent to conscience:

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> Just as I can only answer if I am first questioned, just as each reply requires a "to what," and such a "to what" must be prior to the reply itself, so the "to what" of all responsibleness must necessarily be prior to responsibleness itself.[39]

From this we see the role conscience plays in discovering and fulfilling our unique meaning. At one point in his writing he states that responsibility can not be understood apart from meaning; "the specific meaning of a human life."[40] The implication of the above is that the word heard from conscience is in fact a response, a response to the questions which life itself puts to us. Conscience guides us in our responding, in our taking responsibility for our lives.[41]

b. Doctrine of the Specific Task. This experience of being questioned by life is central to understanding responsibility and the meaning of our lives. It is perhaps the basis of what Frankl speaks of as the "doctrine of the specific task".[42] According to this idea each person and situation is unique. Within that unique person and situation, value can be found by responding to the demands it makes upon us. The value can be found by responding to the demands it makes upon us. The value realized is not merely a subjective projection, but has objectivity, despite the relativity of one's perspective. The relativity of our position in life does not cancel out absolute value, but makes it possible. In fact, objective value is known only in our response, our action in the concrete

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[39]Ibid., p. 58.

[40]Frankl, Doctor and the Soul, p. 26.

[41]Ibid., p. 62.

[42]Ibid., p. 42.

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situation. In each situation there is an appropriate response. This does not mean that there is necessarily only one task, one way to find value for a person's life which persists over time. In fact as the questions of life change, as it were, as the situation of one's life changes, so the demands change, and so does our responsibility. Fulfilling one's life tasks is the all important question. That task will vary from person to person and from situation to situation.[43]

c. Three Groups of Values. It is Frankl's contention that in every situation of life one has freedom and therefore responsibility to realize meaning. Frankl sets forth three general groups of values: creative, experiential, and attitudinal. These are the three principle ways in which one can find meaning. As Frankl puts it:

> The first is what (he) gives to the world in terms of (his) creations; the second is what (he) takes from the world in terms of encounters and experiences; and the third is the stand (he) takes to (his) predicament in case (he) must face a fate which (he) cannot change.[44]

For most people, life's questioning of the meaning of their existence can be responded to in "creative values". In this context life's "task", or "assignment" quality, involves accomplishing the work of one's job, or utilizing one's abilities to the fullest in creative ways (art, music, etc.) or working for a cause, a mission. However, should this avenue for finding meaning be cut off for some reason (for example,

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[43]Ibid., p. 55.

[44]Frankl, Will to Meaning, p. 70.

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one retires, or one has an inhibiting illness) one is still responsible for realizing meaning in life. This can be done through what he calls "experiential values". This refers to finding meaning through experiencing other persons, the beauty of art, music, nature. Of course, it should be noted that we probably all find individual worth and meaning through both ways. This is why Frankl speaks of our responsibility for meaning as sometimes changing from hour to hour. Nevertheless, one value group may become the principle mode for finding meaning. Finally, even in those moments of life when both creative values and experiential values are cut off, Frankl would contend that we still have freedom to take responsibility for our lives, to find meaning. Frankl knew this experience himself in the concentration camp where even the possibility of the richness of experience was curtailed: "There is nothing else to do but to shovel, and nothing else to experience but punishment, hunger and cold."[15] Yet it is this same person who writes:

> In the realization of attitudinal values (he) is free--free "from" all conditions and circumstances, and free "to" the inner mastery of (his) destiny, "to" proper upright suffering. This freedom knows no conditions, it is a freedom "under all circumstances" and until the last breath.[46]

This third group of values, then, concerns the stand we take toward an unalterable fate, and more particularly towards suffering; how we face the destiny which is ours due to our

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[45]Robert C. Leslie, Jesus and Logotherapy (New York: Abingdon, 1965) p. 98.

[46]Ibid.

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biological, psychological, and sociological context. The courage and dignity with which we face this represent what Frankl considers to be among the highest of human values. From this standpoint, as long as a person has consciousness, one has responsibility to find meaning for one's life. At this point we might add that as he sees it, the religious person not only views life in terms of "being responsible for fulfilling tasks, but also as being responsible to the taskmaster."[47] "Task", in reference to the third value group, would here be used as an inclusive term referring to any responding to the concrete situation so as to realize meaning.

d. Temporality and Singularity. Frankl takes us a step further in this discussion of realizing meaning to consider responsibility and meaning in respect to human finitude and death. In this context he speaks of understanding one's responsibility in terms of "temporality and singularity."[48]

In regard to temporality, one is responsible in relationship to the "time" characteristic of human existence. One does not exist in a timeless state in which meaning can be actualized whenever one gets around to it. Instead, we bear the responsibility for what we decide to make of our lives in our time and place. We exist in an historical flow. The meaning of a moment can not be reclaimed once it is past. The fact that at some point we will die does not rob the meaning from that moment, but only adds to the responsibility; one has to realize

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[47]Frankl, Doctor and the Soul, p. 59.

[48]Ibid., p. 64.

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the richness of value available in that moment. He refers to this as the "fragmentary quality" of life.[49] We live and work, then, under an unknown time limit, which Frankl compares to a student under a written examination; one must be prepared for the bell to ring, not so much by completion of the task, but by the quality of its content. The fact that the bell rings does not devaluate it in any way. Responsibility, therefore, grows as we become aware of our finitude in respect to the tasks which "our time" requires of us.

The other factor of human existence, along side the time limitation is that of our own inner finitude and singularity. We are imperfect. Yet our meaning and responsibility in this situation are in fact heightened by this fact, not lessened by it. The fact that I have strengths and weaknesses, for example, means I can supply what others cannot, and that I must depend upon others for those areas of my weakness. This makes for inter-dependence, and the indispensability of each person. Community is readily seen as the context in which one has value and worth. This relates again to the self-transcendence theme in which one can transcend oneself in community. Thus, my individual inner limitations mark me as unique from the rest, and at the same time provide the way by which I am linked to the whole.

Frankl distinguishes at this point between community and "mass". "Mass tends to obliterate individuality, and thus the value of the individual. Community not only provides a

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[49]Ibid., p. 66.

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framework of meaning, but through the individual has meaning, a two-way relationship. "The meaning of the community is constituted by individuality, and the meaning of individuality by community."[50] When a person seeks to escape into the mass, the mob, the society if you will, one is attempting to lose that individuality and the responsibility which accompanies it (e.g. acting only in terms of the whole). A community in its truest sense then is composed of persons who maintain their individual uniqueness, singularity and, therefore, their responsibility.

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[50]Ibid., p. 71.

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Chapter III

H. RICHARD NIEBUHR

This chapter seeks to be a "response" to the issue of the search for meaning raised by Frankl from the theology of H. Richard Niebuhr.

Responding to the centrality of responsibility in Frankl's work, we shall explore Niebuhr's understandings. We will explore with Niebuhr the traditional images of the moral subject and bring to these his own contribution in which he understands the moral agent using the image of the "answerer." Having done so, we will consider his definition of responsibility as being composed of response, interpretation, accountability, and community. Finally, we will explore the two dimensions of the moral subject which make up the context of all response: community and history. Having completed this, we will then follow Niebuhr's movement from natural faith to radical monotheism and will conclude the chapter with a discussion of how revelation is the foundation for the Christian search for meaning.

A. RESPONSIBILITY

1. Images of the Moral Subject

a. Teleological. In the course of history, Niebuhr suggests, there have been several ways of trying to understand

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the moral subject. Two of the most commonly used symbols for this purpose are the "maker" and the "citizen" image. The image of the "maker" is that of an artist who, with a vision of the end product in mind, molds the material at hand to create that vision, that ideal form. To interpret and direct human life with this image would be to do so always in terms of the goal orientation of the agent. This is a teleological approach which sees present action in terms of the end which it serves. Thus, the "end" becomes the all important concern. We use our freedom to choose what our "end" will be, and use our reason to devise ways of meeting those ends.[1] The "good" is defined in terms of what will reach those goals. Using this image of the maker, therefore, the "material" to be formed is the human agent, and fellow agents, and all important is the "telos" or the goal toward which human life is shaped.

b. Deontological. The second common image used for understanding the moral subject is that of the "citizen". The image of the citizen is used to refer to that view which sees the self primarily in relation to rules; rules which the self must make and rules which it must obey. This view would assert that personal existence is less like a work of art by an artist who utilizes and fashions material, than it is a complex of competing forces which must be kept in order; the work of a political venture. From this deontological perspective, we are born, develop, mature and live our entire

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[1]H. Richard Niebuhr, The Responsible Self (New York: Harper & Row, 1963) p. 51.

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lives in relation to the rules and laws of our family and community. In terms of the individual, the task is to somehow control, order, and bring into unity the mental and bodily dynamics present within (fears, angers, hungers, loves).[2] The "administrative self," as he calls it, must somehow maintain a balance and unify them. In terms of the community, the task is to manage or govern various selves who themselves represent many wants and needs. Here the regulations are imposed upon one another. The image of the citizen, therefore, is used to understand the human agent primarily in relation to laws. In all cases the primary question is "what is right"? The "good" is what is right, or lawful.

While each of these images has been illuminating for understanding the moral agent, and while each seems to represent some truth, they tend to be mutually exclusive: the right is defined in terms of what is good, or the good is defined in terms of what is right. The fact that they both seem to have value yet are mutually exclusive implies that there might yet be an over arching image which might embrace the truths of both but with a more complete perspective.

c. Cathekontical. Niebuhr suggests that another image which might better explain our moral existence is that of the "Answerer." The concept here is that of being engaged in dialogue, a conversation in which one encounters nature, society and other persons. One responds to these encounters. The symbolism is that of responsibility. The orientation he

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[2]Ibid., p. 54.

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calls "cathekontic;" what is "fitting" as a response to encounter. What is important to convey at this point is that according to this image we interpret ourselves primarily as responders, answerers to actions upon us (in terms of how we interpret that action).[3] The questions of importance are "what is going on?" and "how can my response to that best fit into the web of interaction taking place?"

Niebuhr does not negate the other images as providing insight into understanding human action. It is only that when used exclusively they are inadequate to describe the complexity of it. The interactional model of response, he feels, at least moves closer to a full picture of the moral agent:

> . . .for teleology is concerned always with the highest good to which it subordinates the right; consistent deontology is concerned with the right, no matter what may happen to our goods; but for the ethics of responsibility the fitting action, the one that fits into a total interaction as response and as anticipation of further response, is alone conducive to the good and alone is right.[4]

2. Defining Responsibility

a. Response. We turn now to the defining of responsibility and its characteristics. Niebuhr summarizes it in the following way:

> The idea or pattern of responsibility may summarily and abstractly be defined as the idea of an agent's action as response to an action upon (him) in accordance with (his) interpretation of the latter action and with (his) expectation of response to (his) response; and all of this is in a continuing community of agents.[5]

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[3] Ibid., p. 57.

[4] Ibid., p. 61.

[5] Ibid., p. 65.

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Niebuhr takes this definition apart for us and breaks it down into four elements: response, interpretation, accountability, and community. To begin with, all action is understood to be in response to action upon us. This refers simply to a basic view supported by the sciences that we live and move in reaction to a context of stimuli from our surroundings. However, the ethical concern is with the action of the "self", which infers a distinction between reflexes (and any other unconscious or involuntary reaction) and "self-action"; reaction is not what is meant by ethical response.

b. Interpretation. That which lifts response as mere reaction to the level of ethical concern is the act of interpretation (i.e. when a response is made to action upon us which is an interpreted action). There are two aspects involved in response to interpreted action: awareness, and interpretation in terms of wholes. To be the action of the self implies an awareness which channels incoming stimuli into a framework of understanding which is our own. The stimuli are not understood in isolation, but in relation to something else. This leads to the second aspect, in that whatever we encounter is related to a larger whole of which that particular person or thing is a part. The relationship between the part and the whole is made, and the response given to it is made in response not only to the part but to the whole which that part represents:

> "We interpret events that force themselves upon us as parts of wholes, of sequences, as symbolic of larger meanings. . .it is these larger patterns in our under-

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> standing that guide. . .our response to action upon us.[6]

Niebuhr does note, however, that while awareness is a part of the interpretation taking place, it is a fact that much of our interpretation is rooted deeply within us and may go back to childhood. One can easily think of illustrations from our tendency to respond to actions of people in terms of our interpretations of the initiator of the action as that person represents a larger category of people; be they white, black, male, female, native, foreign, etc. These responses may be rooted in prejudices learned in childhood even through subtle, non-verbalized attitudes of parents, friends or cultural melieu. To be the act of a responsible self an action must not only be a response to action upon me, but must be response to an action which has been interpreted by me (whether the roots of that interpretation are conscious or not).

c. Accountability. Thus far responsibility has been discussed as the response of a self to action upon it in terms of the self's interpretation of that initial action. However, there is another element to be considered if the response is to be responsible. Niebuhr calls this element "accountability".[7] What is referred to here is our anticipating a response to our response. As we respond to action upon us, we

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[6]H. Richard Niebuhr, "On the Meaning of Responsibility" (unpublished manuscript of address given at Cambridge University, May 25, 1960, pp. 12-13) quoted in J.W. Fowler, To See the Kingdom (New York: Abingdon Press, 1974) p. 153.

[7]Fowler, Ibid.

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we also can expect that our response will evoke some subsequent reaction from the one whom we are acting upon in our response. A response that does not take into consideration what the subsequent reaction might be is not responsible. This means that not only is my action the result of reflection upon what has happened in the immediate past, but also upon what the future will hold as the result of my response. In effect this means my response is put in the context of time and history--past, present, and future. A good summary statement from Niebuhr might be:

> So considered, no action taken as an atomic unit is responsible. Responsibility lies in the agent who stays with (his) action, who accepts the consequences in the form of reactions and looks forward in a present deed to the continued interaction.[8]

The final element which must be included in the definition of responsibility is the communal context in which the response takes place. The response of a self takes place not only in a historical context, but also in a social context which has some continuity in time. The basic assumption underlying this is that the development of the human self takes place only in community:

> The self is dependent upon the faithful response of others in community in order to form a reliable sense of identity, to shape its dominant interpretive images of the real, and to develop conscience and conceptions of moral value.[9]

From this we would understand that the developing child would define much of who and what she or he is in terms of the human

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[8]Niebuhr, Responsible Self, p. 64.

[9]Fowler, p. 154.

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community into which she or he is born and raised. That community has patterns of response, ways of understanding one another and the world, sets of values, norms, and standards which it communicates to the child. It is within this network which the person responds. The responsible, the "fitting" action, is one which fits into that historical and communal network.

3. Dimensions of the Moral Subject

a. Community. Niebuhr speaks of two dimensions of the moral agent which comprise the context in which all response is made: community and history.[10] The first dimension he considers is the social dimension of the self. Niebuhr states that the self is essentially social in its development and existence. He contrasts this with the views presented by the other two images used for understanding the moral agent: The Maker, the Citizen. The Maker image views the self primarily as rational, and focuses upon its intellectual character; self exists primarily in relation to ideas. The Citizen image views the self primarily as moral, and focuses upon its legal character; the self exists primarily in relation to law. The image of Answerer, however, views the self primarily as social, and focuses upon its social character; the self exists primarily in relation to other selves. Niebuhr does not deny that the self also exists in relation to ideas and laws. He

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[10]Albert Jensen, Responsibility in Modern Religious Ethics (Washington: Corpus Books, 1968) p. 140.

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does, however, wish to deny they are comprehensive in themselves for understanding the acting self.

The self does, therefore, exist as mind, and as moral being, but primarily the self evolves and exists as a self in society. Niebuhr cites representatives from social psychology, existential philosophy, sociology, cultural anthropology, and moral philosophy to substantiate his understanding of the self as social.[11] The basic concept is that the self becomes a self known to itself, an object to itself, as it views itself as seen, heard and spoken to by others through dialogue with them. The capacity to see itself as others see it means it may come to know itself as it is known by others. Therefore, the "self" evolves in relation to others. Without another self through which the self can come to know itself by being "known", the self as an object to itself would never come to awareness: "It does not know itself as known; (i.e. I-It situation) it only knows; were it not for the accompanying I-Thou situation it would not know that it knows."[12]

The conscience itself is seen as having a social character. Niebuhr traces this idea through the thought of four moral philosophers. Butler understood conscience to be simply a constituent part of the self; "The principle in (man) by which (he) approves or disapproves. . ."[13] Kant saw conscience as an intellectual and moral capacity which functioned so as to make one feel "as if" one were judged or

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[11]Niebuhr, Responsible Self, pp. 71-75.

[12]Ibid., p. 73. [13]Ibid., p. 74.

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motivated by the command of a real or ideal "other". Hume and Adam Smith, however, removed any "as if" from this understanding and understood conscience to be in fact a product of social interaction: "Conscience is a function of my existence as a social being, always aware of the approval and disapprovals of others."[14] Furthermore, these "others" are not isolated selves but are themselves a part of a larger context of a community. The interaction of isolated "I-Thou" is not enough for understanding the self. The "others", the "Thou's", with which the self comes into existence and responds represent in their particularity a larger community which has certain constant characteristics which make its existence and the existence of the individual self possible:

> So my conscience represents not so much my awareness of the approvals and disapprovals of other individuals in isolation as the ethics of my society, that is, of its mode of interpersonal interactions.[15]

The patterns of interaction in the community which give it cohesiveness and continuity then are represented in the individual selves which the self encounters.

Niebuhr has argued in this first dimension of the self, its social dimension, that the self evolves and exists primarily in dialogue with other social selves which form a community of interaction and interpretation. In discussing the social self, he also describes what he sees to be the triadic nature of the self in response; there is a "third" in every dialogue. For example, response may be made in the

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[14]Ibid., p. 75. [15]Ibid., p. 79.

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triad of interaction between nature, companion, and self. The self may encounter an object or animal in nature, but the interpretation and response made to it must also be made in relation to the society in which one lives. To respond to either society or nature without interpreting, anticipating and responding to the other as well is to fail to exercise one's responsibility. Another triad he speaks of is that of companion, self, and cause. For example, he notes the relationship between two soldiers which is conditioned by the cause which both are fighting for.[16] For a summary statement we might quote his statement that:

> Responsiveness now becomes responsibility in the sense of accountability when response is made not to one being alone but to that being as related with the self to a third reality.[17]

The first dimension of the self, therefore, is its social dimension. The self essentially evolves in social interaction with other selves. The conscience develops as a part of this evolution whereby the self experiences itself as known, approved and disapproved by its companions who themselves represent reflections of the larger patterns of interaction of the community. Finally, into the dual character of the existence of the self in dialogue Niebuhr introduces consideration of the "third" reality to which the self also responds.

b. History. The second dimension of the self in response is that of time; the self is time-full and historical. By saying that the responsible self is timeful and historical,

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[16]Ibid., p. 83. [17]Ibid., p. 82.

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Niebuhr is suggesting that a full understanding of the moral agent must be one which takes into serious consideration its past, present, and future. Briefly, he contrasts the two other images used--the Maker, the Citizen--as being deficient at this point. The teleological approach focuses upon the importance of the future to the degree that past and present seem to lose significance for the acting self. The deontological approach focuses upon the law as that which has validity regardless of the time reference. What is important is to obey the law in the present; past and future fade in importance. For Niebuhr the self as moral agent must be understood in a way which takes seriously the importance of past, present, and future. From his view the self exists in the present, the "now".[18] This "now", however, is to be understood as composed of both the past and future. The self responds out of a past of experiences and inheritance which makes it what it is in the present (i.e. patterns of thought, behavior, language, interaction, memory, etc.). Yet, the future is also present for the self in the form of hopes, fears, expectations and commitments. The self is understood in these ways as time-full, as responding in the context of past, present, and future.

> . . .the self existing always in a now is one that knows itself as having been and as going into existence and into encounter.[19]

Niebuhr next takes up this issue of time and encounter introduced in the above quote. To describe this, Niebuhr employs

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[18]Ibid., p. 93. [19]Ibid.

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the word "compresence": to be present is to be in compresence with what is not myself.[20] To be a self in the present moment of time is in fact to be "compresent", to be present with another self in encounter. "Compresence" appears to refer more to encounter which is particularly challenging, threatening, radically confronting. We have already discussed the self in its social context. The point here is that the "time" context comes to the fore in existence as the self encounters another self or thing; awareness of the "now" becomes intense as one is acted upon and responds to radical encounter. Naturally the past which bears upon the present is made up of such compresences. The future, the expected compresences, also affect the present and the responses of the self. The self as time-full, responding in a context of past, present and future, is the self in encounter; time-fullness is existence in encounter.

As we saw in the second element of responsibility (interpretation), action upon the self in encounter is interpreted and response made to "fit" the interpretation. In discussing the self-in-time he notes that these interpretations are themselves made in a time context. The self has a social and personal past of encounters and ways of interpreting them which it draws upon in the present. Society itself provides patterns and categories of interpretation; cultural, linguistic, political, etc. Also, the individual has a collected storehouse of private, personal experiences which it draws upon. In each new encounter the self has a tendency to interpret

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[20]Ibid., p. 94.

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the action in the way it learned from its private and social past. Interpretation also has a future time dimension in that the self interprets action in terms of what it expects or anticipates in the future. That is, interpretation is based not only on remembrances and past influences, but upon future possibilities and projections for interaction.

Albert Jonson in his discussion of Niebuhr, states that while understanding the self as social and timeful is not unique in moral philosophy, Niebuhr's suggestion that response be made with reference to "universal" community and "total" history is distinctive.[21] Niebuhr would insist that any theory which does not take into consideration the universal community is insufficient. In speaking of the social self Niebuhr described the triadic structure of response. Niebuhr would argue that there is a transcending character of every "third"; the third transcends itself by pointing to a more universal referent or context. Therefore, it is not only in relation to the companion of dialogue, not only to the "third", but also to the transcendent reference, the universal reference, that the self can legitimately evaluate itself. Most "fitting" here would be Niebuhr's example of the church whose members interact with reference to the "personal" third, Jesus, but also respond to the "transcendent" third to which Jesus points. For the religious, this universal other is specific and is the origin and "the center of universal community."[22]

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[21]Jonsen, p. 140.

[22]Niebuhr, Responsible Self, p. 86.

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Niebuhr's thrust is toward universal responsibility:

> . . .a life of responses to actions which is always qualified by our interpretation of these actions as taking place in a universe, and by the future understanding that there will be response to our actions by representatives of universal community or by the generalized other who is universal. . .[23]

In relation to response in the context of total history, Niebuhr is arguing for an understanding of the self in response to a total time framework. Responses may be quite different depending upon whether one, for example, is responding with reference to the time of one's academic career, one's professional career, a lifetime, the lifetime of a given country, or that of a total movement of history. For Niebuhr the response may not stop short of the total history. The self interprets its ultimate historical destiny as moving toward death and destruction or, on the other hand, toward some promise or hope. The response is totally different depending upon the destiny to which one is responding. The point to be made here couples with that of the prior paragraph to assert that for cathekontic ethics, ethics of the "fitting", response must be sought which fits into the context of universal community and total history.

B. FROM NATURAL FAITH TO RADICAL MONOTHEISM

In the introduction we have noted how Niebuhr's theology would place the search for meaning, that which makes life worthwhile, necessarily within the context of faith. For the

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[23]Ibid., p. 87.

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Christian faith the search for meaning would be understood as the movement toward radical monotheism. This movement, this metanoia, the way it comes about, and the meanings which are illumined thereby are really the agenda for this chapter. We will begin with an overview of the course of natural faith to radical monotheism. It is a movement "from God the void to God the enemy and from God the enemy to God the companion," Niebuhr quotes Whitehead as saying.[24] We will then examine in closer detail some of its aspects and ramifications for the search for meaning.

1. Our Natural Faith

Let us start at the beginning of this faith journey with our "natural faith." Faith, for Niebuhr is simply a given of human nature. Out of its own basic need to have a cause to fight for, something to worship and to give meaning to its life, the self creates its own idol, or, much more often, idols:

> Although life is always lived amid conflicting and competing causes, one or more of these always become preeminent. As the source from which all worth is derived and duty is determined, the preeminent cause functions as the ground of personal and social existence. Expressed in religious terms, these absolutized causes function as god or gods, since they guarantee life's value and determine life's purpose.[25]

Referring back to the process alluded to by Whitehead, at this point "God" (meaning the one principle of all Being and value) is experienced as a void: non-existent, or at

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[24]H. Richard Niebuhr, Radical Monotheism and Western Culture (New York: Harper & Row, 1960) pp. 123-124.

[25]Lonnie Kliever, H. Richard Niebuhr (Waco, TX: Word, 1977) p. 87.

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least irrelevant. It is at the point where our natural faith fails us in moments such as "social conflict, personal disintegration, and death"[26] that the inadequacy of our natural faith becomes evident. It is furthermore, at this point that "God" is experienced as the "enemy" which brings down all natural objects of faith and devotion.

a. The Nature of Faith. Let us start by examining in further depth the nature of faith. Niebuhr would note, to begin with, that faith is more than intellectual belief, assent, or agreement about the truth or falsehood, existence or nonexistence, of someone or something. We might intellectually agree or believe in some things, and yet not have "faith"--not trust in them, count on them, rely upon them, have confidence in them, or be committed to them. Faith involves all of the latter. It is more than intellectual assent.

1) Trust. The Faith relationship has two aspects. One is trust.[27] Faith involves putting trust in someone that will value us and give value to our lives. In a friendship, Niebuhr illustrates, one has faith, one trusts that he or she is valued by another and will continue to be so. That other person can be a center of value that one depends upon for his or her value. Another example is nationalism, where a person places all trust in the country as the context in

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[26]Donald B. Fadner, The Responsible God (Missoula, MT: Scholars, 1975) p. 137.

[27]Niebuhr, Radical Monotheism, p. 116.

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which life has meaning and value: it becomes the source of one's life, one's identity, purpose, the supplier of every need, the context in which one determines right and wrong, the reality in relationship to which other things and beings in life have their value as expressions of, or channels of, its life. The nation becomes the center of value that one relies upon to give value to one's life.

2) Loyalty. The other aspect of the faith relationship is loyalty.[28] Faith involves loyalty to that in which we put our trust, to that which we make a center of value. A friendship, again, illustrates a faith relationship in which one values and is loyal to another person. Nationalism, too, exemplifies that faith loyalty in which the country becomes an object of devotion, and the cause to which one pledges and gives allegiance. The "center of value" and the "cause" really become one and the same.

As can be seen, being valued and valuing are integral components of faith, or are part of the faith relationship. In this sense trust is seen as the passive, and loyalty the active, aspect of faith. Niebuhr would contend that to really be a faith relationship the active aspect must come into play. At some point faith as trust in a value center must become loyalty to that center as a cause: "faith is an active thing, a committing of self to something."[29] Faith loyalty ". . . values the center and seeks to enhance its power and glory.

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[28]Ibid., p. 18. [29]Ibid., p. 117.

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It makes that center its cause for which to live and labor."[30] Finally, it should be included here that for Niebuhr this faith as trust and loyalty are inevitable in the human situation. It is not really a matter of whether or not one has faith, but rather what it is that one has faith in:

> It is a curious and inescapable fact about our lives, of which I think we all become aware at some time or another, that we cannot live without a cause, without some object of devotion, some center of worth, something on which we rely for our meaning. In this sense all (men) have faith because they are (men) and cannot help themselves, just as they must and do have some knowledge of their world, though their knowledge be erroneous.[31]

He lables the various value centers and causes by which we live "gods."

b. Forms of Faith

1) Henotheism. Given this position, Niebuhr delineates three basic forms which faith takes: henotheism, polytheism, and monotheism. Henotheism is the worship of one god among the many. What Niebuhr is referring to specifically here is a faith in a closed society, or nationalism: "the ultimate reference in all answers, in all questions about the meaning of individual life and about the cause for which one lives is made, in Bergson's phrase, to some closed society."[32] In nationalism one receives one's value from the nation. One also values and is committed to the country as one's cause; it becomes the purpose and goal of all one's being and actions.

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[30] Ibid., p. 18.

[31] Ibid., p. 118. [32] Ibid., p. 25.

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One's country or society becomes a "god," among the many possible gods.

2) Polytheism. Polytheism is the worship of many gods. Instead of having one center of value and loyalty for one's life, one has a whole variety. Niebuhr notes two examples of current polytheism: (1) epicureanism, in which one's life is centered around and devoted to the avoidance of pain and the maximazation of pleasure which, it is hoped, will give value and worth;(2) existentialism, in which the self becomes the cause and value center. Here worth is sought in a variety of centers and causes from which one hopes to win value by proving one's worth. None are given full loyalty. None of these centers will wholly satisfy. In polytheism the self becomes as fragmented as its many centers of value and loyalty:

> The pluralism of the gods has its counterpart in the pluralism of self and society. What is valuable in the self is not its being in wholeness or selfhood but the activities, the knowing, creating, loving, worshipping, and directing that issue from it. It has become a bundle of functions tied together by the fibers of the body and the brain. So also the society is an assemblage of associations devoted to many partial interests, held together in meaningful unity by no common derivation from a value center and by no loyalty to an inclusive cause.[33]

c. The Breakdown of Our Natural Faith

1) Failures of Henotheism and Polytheism. Having reviewed these first two forms of faith we must note that for Niebuhr these are totally inadequate to provide "principles

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[33]Ibid., p. 30.

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of value and valuation." They are simply not inclusive enough. Since in both polytheism and henotheism one chooses one value center, or several, out of the many, one may be missing or denying the values which another "center" may afford and deserve. Then, of course, one would also have to have still another reference by which to choose and judge which is more "valuable." This fragmented approach can only cause division, in one's own self, community, and world as one is pulled to different loyalties. A further effect of these forms of faith is that one begins to find value and meaning in none of these limited value centers, resulting in meaninglessness. As these fragmentary and finite centers of value and causes all have their limits they must eventually fail to value us, to be the foundation for our value, and to be that which we value and are committed and loyal to. Therefore our value and meaning are tenuous and ultimately will collapse. Finally, inherent in what has just been said is that Henotheism and Polytheism, in and of themselves, cannot adequately respond to that reality or power which makes them finite and which eventually brings them down.

> But by whatever name we call it, this law of things, this reality, this way things are, is something with which we must reckon. We may not be able to give a name to it. . . But it is there. . .the last shadowy and vague reality, the secret of existence by virtue of which things come into being, are what they are, and pass away.[34]

Niebuhr sees the breakdown and failure of these inadequate centers of value, gods, as the precondition of

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[34]Ibid., p. 122.

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monothestic faith. It is in their failure that one recognizes that more transcendent power and reality:

> . . .through this process the principle of being begins to become a more or less definable object over against the self and distinguishable from all other objects, an object to which the self can and must relate in all its responses to the reality given in and to its experience.[35]

Niebuhr would also suggest that in this failure of our natural religion can be seen God's judgment. This "enemy" will not allow itself to be one among the many but insists on being the One beyond the many objects and idols of our natural faith. One author has gone so far as to say:

> Thus God continually disrupts those human lives and groups which are centered in the gods of natural faith, at the cost of great suffering to all involved, in order to open them up to the possibility of a radical faith that never divides and never dies.[36]

2) Ethics of Natural Faith. With this interpretation of God as the "enemy" which is bent on our destruction, the power which has brought us into being is not trustworthy, and the effort of fighting this enemy and trying to survive becomes all important. The way to this survival is what is called the "ethics of defense." That is, with this "wisdom of survival," the self seeks security and protection through defensive responses to its world. Fowler notes three forms which Niebuhr suggests this ethics of defense may take: (1) an Epicurean form, (2) a form characterized by obsession with survival, and (3) and a form which seeks immortality.[37]

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[35]Fadner, p. 137. [36]Kliever, p. 89.

[37]James W. Fowler, To See the Kingdom (New York: Abingdon, 1974) p. 158.

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Briefly the Epicurean form is that response which seeks pleasure as escape from the desperate realities, the impending doom. The form characterized by obsession with survival reacts with aggressive hostility, apparently in paranoid fashion, to destroy all perceived enemies or threats, and to preserve itself at all costs. The third form refers to the effort to invest oneself in such causes, ideals, endeavors which claim to defy this "power" and in so doing to gain a form of survival and immortality. Referring to Niebuhr's view of polytheism and henotheism, Jonsen says of the ethics of defense:

> (Man) is led in (his) effort to survive to center (his) life in certain "values" which (he) feels can protect (him) or over which (he) feels that (he) can exercise control. Thus (he) has either many centers of value, which are "gods", the objects of human trust; or one such center in which, although it is only finite, (he) seeks to locate all (his) devotion.[38]

3) Freedom for Reinterpretation. In the midst of this vicious circle, however, Niebuhr would assert that there is a human freedom to break out of it. Niebuhr puts it this way:

> If we look in all this for the arbitrary free will, we can locate it only at the point where the agent commits (himself) to inquiry into the further, longer series of interactions and into the responses taking place in a larger society, or at the point where (he) commits (himself) to resolute questioning of the adequacy of (his) stereotyped, established interpretations.[39]

From this one would say that Niebuhr locates the problem in responding to too narrow a context, and that the interpretation

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[38]Albert Jonsen, Responsibility in Modern Religious Ethics (Washington: Corpus, 1968) pp. 142.

[39]Niebuhr, Responsible Self, pp. 105-106.

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of the world is incorrect or in some way deficient. This freedom to interpret opens up the possibility of revising and reinterpreting that which acts upon the self. One's personal and social past and future can be reinterpreted or revised by a radical questioning or by a total reconstruction of one's interpretation. Yet, he would insist that significant change will take place only when the belief that "we are perishing" is exploded and another is adopted:

> Yet all of these social and personal interpretations of remembered pasts and anticipated futures do not radically change either our general pattern of understanding of action upon us or our general mode of fitting response so long as our sense of the ultimate context remains unrevised.[40]

2. Movement toward Monotheism

a. Role of Jesus. Niebuhr's theological focus is primarily theocentric, and his central concern is the reinterpretation of human understanding of God from that of a hostile power to that of a power with goodness.[41] Niebuhr cautions against elevating the position of Jesus in a way which eclipses or competes with the one center of value, God. Fowler suggests three particular roles which Jesus plays in Niebuhr's thought: the "prototypical faithful man", the "mediator of faith", and the "expression and symbol of a participation by God in the suffering of the beings dependent upon (him)".[42]

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[40]Ibid., p. 106.

[41]Hans Frei in Paul Ramsey (ed.) Faith and Ethics (New York: Harper & Row, 1957) p. 94.

[42]Fowler, pp. 160-161.

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The first role, Jesus as the "prototypical faithful man", refers to the way in which Jesus demonstrated the kind of trust in God which is possible for all human kind, and the kind of responses which are possible as a result of such faith. In this way Jesus revealed human nature as it was meant to be. Jesus as the "mediator of faith" refers to Jesus as the one through whom God demonstrated God's faithfulness. The resurrection reverses the interpretation that "we are perishing," it gives the impetus for encouraging human trust in God's goodness and letting go of the "myth" that life is moving only toward destruction; God is faithful. The third role which Jesus plays in Niebuhr's theology is God's expressing God's participation in human suffering. God's power and goodness are understandable only if God participates in human suffering. As Fowler puts it:

> "The supposed union of supreme goodness and supreme power in God does not square with the suffering of innocence in a cosmic vicariousness unless (a) God has limited (his) sovereignty over the consciousness and actions of (man), and (b) (he) too shares in the agonies and waste of being that result from human autonomy and divine lawfulness."[43]

The suffering of God represented by Jesus is fundamental for the change-over in interpretation of human relation to God.

b. Ethics Reinterpreted: Indicative and Imperative. Thus we have seen that with the human potential for reinterpretation and God's action in and through Jesus, the shift from mistrust to trust can take place. Jesus calls into question

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[43]Ibid., p. 161.

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our "wisdom of survival", calls into question the finality of death. The beginning of trust in the one upon whom we are absolutely dependent for our existence is initiated. Instead of a self being torn and divided in its responses to the many centers of value, or instead of a self which has unified its responses in a finite center, the self is finally unified in the ultimate value center. It is the belief that:

> I am one in my many-ness in myself and so responsible as self, as I face the One action in the actions of the many upon me. Responsibility affirms: "God is acting in all actions upon you. . ."[44]

This is what is referred to as the "indicative"[45] of Niebuhr's view of the message. This is the faith that God the Creator, Governor and Redeemer is trustworthy and good, and it is this God whom we confront in all things of our existence.

This indicative is coupled with the imperative: ". . .so respond to all actions upon you as to respond to (his) actions."[46] Because of God's revelation of Godself as trustworthy and good, trust in God becomes possible as well as the beginning of trust in all being because of its common source and intent. The response which comes out of such a faith position is the transformation of all ethics of defense into an ethics of responsibility. Fowler summarizes this imperative of response in faith:

> So act as to express conscious membership in the universal community of faithfulness, to respond with hope to redemptive intent and power in all actions upon you,

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[44]Niebuhr, Responsible Self, p. 126.

[45]Jonsen, p. 147.

[46]Niebuhr, Responsible Self, p. 126.

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> and to express trust in and loyalty to the cause of that One to whom and to whose cause Jesus the Christ is loyal.[47]

The "indicative and imperative" are coupled in Niebuhr's thought; the imperative flowing from the indicative: "God is acting in all actions upon you. So respond to all actions upon you as to respond to (his) action."[48] Jonsen summarizes the above points in a way that places them into the larger context of responsibility:

> "Interpret your action and response in such a way that your response does not absolutize a finite value; anticipate that beyond your immediate response there will be an ultimate response from one who accepts; move to establish a community in which all (men) can respond to the action of the One." Responsibility means: meet in all your intentions the one intention of (him) who draws all things to (himself).[49]

c. Radical Monotheism.

1) Faith in the Principle of Being and Value. Having charted the movement from "God the void to God the enemy, and from God the enemy to God the companion," let us conclude this portion of the chapter by exploring the definition of Radical Monotheism in greater depth.

Hoedemaker provides a direct statement that can lead off this discussion:

> It means. . .that God is one, and that the one God is the only God; but it cannot exist unless it is convinced that the one God is good. . .[50]

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[48]Niebuhr, Responsible Self, p. 126.

[49]Jonsen, p. 149.

[50]Niebuhr, Radical Monotheism, p. 45.

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To begin with, then, monotheism is faith in a God which is not one reality among many realities, but is rather "One that is beyond the many." This "One" is also the source of all the many. It is what Niebuhr calls the "principle of being" as opposed, for example, to the "principle of society" found in the other forms of faith.[51]

As Hoedemaker's quote suggests, radical monotheism is also trust that the principle, the source, of Being is also the Principle of Value; that the one God is all good; that the one God is the source of all good; that in as much as this all-good-God is the source of all being, all being must also be good. Niebuhr has capsulized this unity of the Principle of Being and Value by saying the two great mottoes of radical monotheism are:

> "I am the Lord thy God; thou shalt have no other gods before me" and "Whatever is, is good."[52]

There is only one God means the secularization of all persons, places, and communities; they are relative and finite.

> The first effect is the consistent secularization of all those symbols and objects that polytheism and henotheism meet with sacred fear and joy.[53]

At the same time, however, because the Principle of Being is also the Principle of Value, all these relative things and beings are made sacred:

> The counterpart of this secularization, however, is the sanctification of all things. Now every day is the day the Lord has made; every nation is a holy people called by (him) into existence. . .every person is sacred. . .[54]

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[51]Ibid., p. 32. [52]Ibid., p. 37.

[53]Ibid., p. 52. [54]Ibid.

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Another excellent statement of this faith in the unity of the Principle of Being and the Principle of Value is noted by Hoedemaker:

> Monotheistic faith, in concreto, is "love of being; rejoicing in existence, in its source, totality, and particularity. . .the conviction that there is faithfulness at the heart of things.[55]

Finally, Niebuhr notes that monotheism is less than radical if Being and Value are separated. Radical monotheism could not say that in the created universe only some of the created beings are valuable to God. All things are dependent upon God for existence and are valued by God; "creator and the God of Grace" are one.[56]

2) The Dual Nature of Radical Monotheism. Niebuhr also talks about this faith unity in the terms of the beforementioned dual nature of faith (trust and loyalty). We may say that as faith reliance he understands radical monotheism to be a reliance that this source of all being also provides the significance of the self and of all beings. This is, therefore, a kind of universal faith reliance.

> It is the assurance that because I am, I am valued, and because you are, you are beloved, and because whatever is has being, therefore it is worthy of love.[57]

As faith loyalty, radical monotheism is absolute loyalty to the Principle of Being. However, since the principle of Being also has a "cause," which is the "realm of being," if we are

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[55]H. Richard Niebuhr quoted in Libertos A. Hoedemaker, The Theology of H. Richard Niebuhr (Philadelphia: Pilgrim, 1970) p. 45.

[56]Niebuhr, Radical Monotheism, p. 32. [57]Ibid.

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to be loyal to God, we must also be loyal to God's cause; in being loyal to God one must also be loyal to the realm of being and to be loyal to the realm of being, one must be loyal to God. Finally, just as faith reliance in God pushes towards a universal faith reliance in the value of all being, so faith loyalty progresses into a universal loyalty to the whole realm of being:

> It is not only their loyalty to each other that makes them one realm of being, but the loyalty that comes from beyond them, that originates and maintains them in their particularity and their unity. Hence loyalty expresses itself as loyalty to each particular existent in the community of being and to the universal community.[58]

Using Niebuhr's words, we may summarize this third form of faith, this radical monotheism, as "faith that is directed toward the one beyond the many, in whom the many are one."[59]

In a broad and general sense we have answered the question: "How does one come to faith?" Yet, we can not stop here for radical monotheism brings us into relationship with God and once this has happened, meaning in our lives undergoes a revolution that can only be understood by coming to a fuller understanding of the meaning of revelation. With this theme in mind we launch into a whole new level of discussion as we glean from The Meaning of Revelation some of the major points which bear on "the search for meaning." Indeed, through revelation, radical faith in God presents the believer with an ever renewed and renewing approach to the meaning of life.

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[58]Ibid., p. 35. [59]Ibid., p. 16.

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3. Meaning Through Revelation

a. The Historical and Religious Relativism of Revelation. Revelation is historically and religiously relative. For Niebuhr discussions of meaning and value have their locus in revelation. Meaning and value are revealed in revelation. Thus, understanding his concept of revelation becomes critical. To begin with, revelation is admittedly and necessarily historically and religiously relative. It must be historically relative because all our ideas, knowledge and understanding are a part of a given standpoint in time and space. We cannot escape the relative position of our historical stance. Within this context it seeks to be objectively relativistic: to discover and discern what is characteristic of, appropriate to, true to, a given historical perspective and viewpoint.

Revelation must also be religiously relative. Drawing upon the contributions of Schleiermacher and Ritschl (while at the same time trying to avoid what he sees to be their failures) he suggests that revelation must begin from a position of absolute dependence (Schleiemacher) and from a personal relationship (Ritschl). It must begin from a position of absolute dependence for that is the nature of who and what God is, something upon which one is absolutely dependent—otherwise we would not be speaking of "God." It must involve a personal relationship; it must be "my God" and any discussion must assume that personal relationship. To be consistent any Christian theology can not lose these basic components which are by definition integral to a faith perspective; absolute

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dependence and personal relationship. Again within this context it seeks to be objective about what is appropriate, characteristic, and true to such a relationship to God.[60]

Niebuhr notes that the Christian revelation has a self-critical element as a part of its very nature. The Christian revelation insists upon a radical monotheism in which there is only one absolute. This relativises all approaches, all viewpoints. It exposes the limitations and also the mixed and self-serving motivations, sin, which is a part of our theology. It "should" by its nature guard against absolutizing any one perspective and insists upon the recognition of our confessional, relative approach.[61]

b. Search for Meaning Within Internal History. With this grounding in both faith and history as the position from which we begin our search we must assume that meaning must be found in some partnership of these two. Historically faith and history, or faith and reason, have been pitted against each other as rivals for truth. Niebuhr suggests that indeed there is something of a paradox, but one which can be resolved in a practical sense by making a distinction between external and internal history. Meaning must be sought for in an internal history which is informed and tempered by external history.

In explaining this distinction we must begin by

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[60]H. Richard Niebuhr The Meaning of Revelation (New York: Macmillan, 1941) pp. 16-17.

[61]Ibid., p. 30.

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noting that, as we said before, faith must be confessional because of its historical and religious relativism. The search for meaning must be from within a position of being personally related to and absolutely dependent upon God. This internal view, this internal history, is the only position from which such a search can be pursued. One cannot totally extricate oneself from that perspective else it ceases to be a search for what faith understands to be "God", that on which one is absolutely dependent. One cannot, if one searches for "God," do so from an outsider's, a nonparticipant's, an observer's view. Therefore, internal history is where we must look for revelation. Internal history is a history of persons in relationship, and is necessarily personal and subjective, and must concern I-Thou relationships and selves in community. It is concerned with qualities and values. External history on the other hand is a history of things, impersonal objects and its method insists on being concerned only with primary and secondary causes of events that all participants can observe and experience.[62] It seeks a pure reason, not a practical reason.

Value, time, and human association are understood from different perspectives in internal and external history. Value for external history, for example, has to do with strength and power.[63] Value for internal history has to do with what is of worth to selves, what affects their destiny, what improves the quality of life. Something can be powerful,

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[62]Ibid., p. 47. [63]Ibid., p. 49.

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but unless it has some value for selves, it is not valuable. "Time" for external history is a matter of quantity, and sequence. Time for internal history, for example, is measured not in minutes and hours, but instead in terms of internal change, growth. The past is not gone but remains a part of the present. The future lives in the present as a living possibility. Human association in external history pertains to the external bonds, contracts, instincts, drives, laws, customs, beliefs that relate people to each other. The individual is viewed only as a complex of psychological, social, economical factors. For internal history, on the other hand, the concern is for the community of selves in the context of which the individuals have identity and purpose as related to one another with the internal bonds of common loves, memories and concerns.

From Niebuhr's view, then, meaning can only be sought within internal history. Conflicts of faith and reason have arisen when the church has tried to locate revelation in external history;[64] we in the Christian faith cannot point to historically religious events in our lives as though they were visible from any external viewpoint. However, at the same time we cannot divorce ourselves from external history, external views of our history, our associations and our activities. External views of our history, while not containing the whole truth do contain "a" truth.[65] It is for the Christian community to note these external histories and take them

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[64]Ibid., p. 54. [65]Ibid., p. 62.

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into itself, into its internal history. Thus, while meaning must be discovered in internal history, it must also include external history in its reasoning and search. God sees from within and from without. God is the only "one" who can fully do so. We can only get such a perspective partially, and only be reflection after the fact. In our present we are always on the "inside" of a point of view, we are always participants in a relative position.

c. Revelation, Reason, and Imagination in the Search for Meaning. As participants in an inner history we search within that history for an order, a pattern which will give meaning to our lives and relationships. For Niebuhr such a pattern is based on revelation using reason and imagination.

Revelation must provide the basis for arriving at such a pattern of meaning. Many parts of our inner history, in and of themselves, do not seem to point to any such pattern. Revelation as he defines it

> . . .means for us that part of our history which illuminates the rest of it and which is itself intelligible.[66]

> By revelation in our history, then, we mean that special occasion which provides us with an image by means of which all the occasions of personal and common life become intelligible.[67]

This revelation becomes the basis of our reasoning and is the means by which a rational pattern is arrived at. Of course Christianity identifies that revelation with Jesus. This reasoning on the basis of revelation in our inner history

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[66]Ibid., p. 68. [67]Ibid., p. 80.

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is what he talks about as the "reasoning of the heart", which implies the practical reasoning of an involved participant in a given inner history as opposed to the pure reason of the theoretically detached, impersonal observer. Each, practical and pure reason, has its own sphere of operation and its own distortions to correct.

Reason and imagination work together to arrive at a rational pattern based on revelation. Imagination is described in its function:

> By means of ideas we interpret what we sense and sense what we interpret. We anticipate connections before they are given and through imagination supply what is lacking in the immediate datum. So we may apprehend the meaning of a brown, rough texture of certain size and shape as the bark of a tree, or as a tree, or even as an experience of the adaptation of life to its environment. In such knowing of things every thing depends upon the continuous conversation between sensation and imagination.[68]

While imagination is essential to knowing, it can also cause problems by itself:

> We are not easily deceived by sensation but are fooled by a false imagination which interprets some sense datum as part of a whole context to which it does not belong according to repeated, critical and common experience. By using concepts, images, patterns--be they visual images or the refined symbols of language and mathematics--which do not apply to the experience at hand we are led to false expectations and to inept reactions.[69]

Reason tries to use appropriate images so that our interpretations truly reflect the reality of common experience. The analogy from nature and natural science applies to our internal history where our joys, our sorrows, hopes, loves--all our feelings--are interpreted by the use of imagination.

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[68]Ibid., p. 70. [69]Ibid., p. 71.

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Reason functions so that we can decide whether our images of interpretation are accurate and adequate or whether they are "evil imaginations of the heart".[70]

Niebuhr speaks of the dangers of using "evil" images to interpret life, people, and events; the "evil imaginations of the heart." Niebuhr notes that in insanity a person's feelings, emotions, are real but they are interpreted so as to suggest persecution, or delusions of grandeur, inferiority, relationships that do not really exist. In society he notes that evil imaginations of the heart may, for example, interpret a race of people as inferior or superior. For the individual or the society that operates on the basis of such false, evil images there will result conflict and turmoil because they do not fit the reality in which they try to exist. The most common of these evil images by which people interpret life is egotism; the self, or the group, or the nation, thinks of itself as the center of life. In this evil imagination one's own welfare is all important; others are only instrumental of that. Even God revolves around them, personally responsible for each of their sufferings, rewarding, on the basis of their merit, their joys. The results of "evil imaginations" are disasterous for selves and for the world.

Just as disasterous as evil imaginations of the heart, however, is the attempt to use inadequate images to interpret life. This draws even closer to Frankl's concern as Niebuhr describes the inadequacy of mechanistic images;

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[70]Ibid., p. 72.

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of relating to people in terms of their full-dimensionality. The truth is that we are not "things" and we cannot use the facts of external history to apply to people and relationships. We are not simply the product of drives and instincts and social conditioning that might otherwise be understood as determining us. There is more to humanity than that. Niebuhr illustrates the inadequacy of such a mechanistic approach:

> We interpret the conflict between rich and poor as the consequence of economic evolution in which impersonal factors are decisive; machines and markets, conditions of production and distribution rather than the good or evil wills of (men) account for the miseries of the proletariat and the fears of the bourgeosie. Nations are understood as geographic, biological and economic units that can not help being what they are and doing what they do. They are to be dealt with, therefore, without praise or blame as one deals with undernourished bodies or with maladjusted carburetors. . .so the heart reasons with ideas borrowed from the head; the participant in life uses the images of an observer of life's external aspects.[71]

Niebuhr suggests that such mechanistic images are inadequate for two reasons. First, one can not consistently relate to others on such a basis. As soon as one ceases to observe and becomes a participant, more personal images are needed.

> The participant in life simply cannot escape thinking in terms of persons and values. It would be possible to do so only if (he) could depersonalize the self, become a body without an inner life, without joys and sorrows, loves and hates, without neighbors, without hope or fear--a thing in a world of things. But in such a world no truth would ever need to be uttered; existence without worth or unworthiness would be all in all. The images of the observational method are so out of place in the life of participation that they must be abandoned in favor of other ideas or surreptitiously modified when employed by moral agents in movements of decisive action.[72]

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[71]Ibid., p. 76. [72]Ibid., p. 78.

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Secondly, such a method is inadequate because it "leaves large areas of our experience unrationalized and uncontrolled."[73] Here Niebuhr strikes at any approach that gives up on images of self and worth, and that abandons the moral enterprise because indeed these can not be reduced to the impersonal images and laws of natural science. Niebuhr contends that this is inadequate because while indeed sometimes morality, politics, religion and the human self in relation to other selves is irrational, this does not void them from existence. Withdrawing from the effort to find more rational patterns in these is simply to fail to try to bring behavior and experience under some reasonable control, or it is to let custom and tradition rule instead of exerting more apt principles. Niebuhr suggests that it is not so much that it is impossible to find reasoned and rational images for interpreting the life of selves in community, but rather that:

> the patterns which pure or scientific reason employs in understanding the behavior of things are inapplicable to the personal sphere. . .The errors and superstitions fostered by bad imagination in this realm can not be overcome by eliminating ideas of self and of value for selves but only by more adequate images of the same order.[74]

The search for meaning, in Niebuhr's way of understanding, must find its destination in an image which is neither ultimately self-centered (Niebuhr's animism) nor inadequate (mechanistic or impersonal). Revelation, from the Christian perspective, provides such an image by which the events of past, present, and future can be understood.

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[73]Ibid., p. 76. [74]Ibid., p. 79.

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We will follow Niebuhr's exploration of how revelation makes possible the discovery of meaning in each of these.

4. Finding Meaning in the Past, Present and Future Through the Christ Image

a. Past

1) Revelation Helps Us Understand Our Past. Finding meaning in the past through revelation helps us to understand and remember our past, as well as to appropriate the history of others. To begin with, revelation makes possible our understanding of the past. The example given is that of Israel as it sought to find meaning in its past. The Exodus became for it that revelatory moment that made intelligible all its prior memories of experiences, patriarchs, and matriarchs of its history. No longer was this simply a meaningless collection of stories and sequence of events. Instead, by the light of the revelatory event of the Exodus they began to interpret God as having been present in all those prior experiences with a purpose, a meaning to unfold. The Church of course did the same with the revelation of the Jesus event. It saw the events of Judaism's history, and the history of humanity, as part of a single drama of God's purpose.[75] Through revelation the parts of one history can become an intelligible, integrated part of a larger whole.

2) Revelation Helps us Recall and Reclaim our Past. Secondly, by utilizing revelation to interpret our past we

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[75]Ibid., p. 82.

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are enabled to recall those events which had heretofore been ignored, forgotten, or suppressed because they did not fit into the over-all pattern which had been informed by inadequate and/or evil images. When parts of our history are ignored, forgotten, or suppressed they do not disappear but live on affecting unconsciously, or subconsciously, the present.

> Our buried past is mighty; the ghosts of our (fathers) and of the selves that we have been haunt our days and nights though we refuse to acknowledge their presence.
>
> The revelatory event resurrects their buried past. It demands and permits that we bring into the light of attention our betrayals and denials, our follies and sins.[76]

Revelation sets in motion a process in which the past is made intelligible as a part of the larger whole of God's purpose. As such, that which was forgotten, even these most painful sins, is brought to memory in a continual process of "excavation," if you will, of the past-- a process that is infinitely drawing into itself our forgotten history.

3) Revelation Helps us Appropriate the Past of Others. Finally, Niebuhr speaks of revelation as functioning so as to help us appropriate meaning not only from our own inner history, but from the inner histories of others. Whatever particular racial, national, or cultural background we may have, through Jesus we share in a common history in which the inner history of Christ becomes our history; e.g. Moses, Abraham, Ruth, the Prophets, Rome, become a part of our history. Furthermore, in-as-much as Jesus is the image of revelation whereby

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[76]Ibid., p. 83.

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the reasoning heart interprets and understands its own history, and in as much as that image is used to understand and interpret the histories of others, so the whole of human history becomes a part of the same drama in which the same God is active and in which the intelligible pattern is visible. Finally, through revelation that whole of human history becomes ours and the inner histories of others become our own:

> Beyond all that, he is the man through whom the whole of human history becomes our history. Now there is nothing that is alien to us. All the struggles, searchings after light, all the wanderings of all people, all the sins of (men) in all places become parts of our past through him. We must remember them all as having happened in and to our community.[77]

Those three functions of revelation with regard to our past have implications for individual and social conversion and reconciliation. Without an understanding, remembering, and appropriating of our past we can not have individual or social unity and integration. The self can not find inner unity unless it can understand and recollect the memories of its own inner history. However, it can not achieve full unity unless it can find itself in the larger context of its fellows; through appropriation. In terms of our theme we might say that meaning can only be discovered in our past in an integration of the personal and social. The same is true analogously on the social level. Our "community" can not find inner unity until it can reconcile its own history with that of the histories of other communities, and our world can not find unity until its communities can appropriate the inner

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[77]Ibid., p. 85.

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histories of one another; sins and all! This can only happen in a spirit of repentance.[78] And, we might further include, the meaning of our community can not be found except as it can appropriate the meanings of other communities.

b. Present. Revelation also helps us to interpret and find meaning in the present. Niebuhr distinguishes between past and present by saying:

> If our past in inner history is everything we carry with us, or what we are, our present is our action, our doing and our suffering deeds done to us.[79]

As inadequate and evil imaginations in relation to the past can cause personal and social disintegration, so in the present these can prevent us from really understanding what is going on now and what it is we are doing to each other in the present.

1) Revelation as Parable and Analogy for Finding Meaning in the Present. Revelation is used as parable and analogy, and as rational image in relation to understanding, and finding meaning in, the present. In the first of these, parable and analogy, the events of the Jesus story become a parable or analogy for the events of our lives. Through this analogy, the present becomes understood as the scene in which the God who was active in Jesus' life, is active in our lives, and in which human sinfulness and triumph, active in the Jesus story, is active in our story.

> Not with complete clarity, to be sure, yet as in a glass darkly we can discern in the contemporary confusion of

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[78] Ibid., p. 88 [79] Ibid., p. 89.

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> our lives the evidence of a pattern in which, by great turmoil of (men) and God, a work of redemption goes on which is like the work of Christ.[80]

In this sense "revelation" means the "revelatory event" which, by analogy, helps us understand our present.

2) Revelation Helps us Derive Principles for Understanding the Present. Another way revelation functions with regard to finding meaning in the present is by providing the opportunity to derive theories, concepts, doctrines and principles by which to understand the present; for example, forgiveness of sins, reconciliation, obedience. In this sense revelation might easily be identified as a set of doctrines or ideas.

Niebuhr is quick to remind us that revelation is a matter of internal history which always is a personal and relational history of selves. Therefore revelation is that which helps us find meaning in the present by illuminating a rational "principle of unity in a duration"[81] whereby the present is understood as an outgrowth of the past. "Revelatory occasion" and "theoretical principle" are not mutually exclusive; we need a conceptual, rational image to help us to understand the self in relation to other selves. "Revelatory occasion" and "theoretical principle" should be a unity. Niebuhr would also qualify his view by saying:

> Concepts and doctrines derived from the unique historical moment are important but less illuminating than the occasion itself. For what is revealed is not so much the mode of behavior as the divine self.[82]

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[80]Ibid., p. 91. [81]Ibid., p. 93. [82]Ibid., p. 95.

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Niebuhr would want to be certain we understand that what is revealed in revelation is God, a living reality, not an abstraction thereof; it is not a set of doctrines, laws, or theories.

The search for meaning in the present, we would conclude, following Niebuhr, is made possible by revelation. The Christ event provides, by analogy and rational image the means by which we can interpret our present.

c) Future. Finally, with regard to finding meaning in the future, revelation again is the basis of the reasoning heart's interpretation. To use the cross as the basis for understanding our future is to use an image which is neither inadequate nor self-centered. It sees the full range of both catastrophic and trimphal possibilities of our human potential in relation to God. It envisions the true possibilities of disaster inherent in our human nature with its sins. It also knows of the true possibility in the resurrection, in the activity of God. In the search for meaning in our future, revelation provides a more adequate image for us to understand and discern those living potentialities in our lives.

It is revelation, then, which makes possible any search for meaning in our past, present, and future. A quote from Niebuhr summarizes this:

> When we speak of revelation we mean that something has happened to us in our history which conditions all our thinking and that through this happening we are enabled to apprehend what we are, what we are suffering and doing and what our potentialities are. What is otherwise

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> arbitrary and dumb fact becomes related, intelligible, and eloquent fact through the revelatory event.[83]

A final note to the discussion of the discovery of meaning in time through revelation should be added with respects to what Niebuhr calls "progressive revelation". The use of revelation by the reasoning heart as a basis of interpretation and finding meaning continually sheds new light and presents clearer understanding. Our meanings are enriched, clarified and corrected:

> Nevertheless revelation is a moving thing in so far as its meaning is realized only by being brought to bear upon the interpretation and reconstruction of ever new human situations in an enduring movement, a single drama of divine and human action.[84]

Thus, meaning is not some static statement or once-and-for-all, never-changing thing. It is, rather, undergoing constant renewal and revision as circumstances change, as we grow, as revelation in relation to our past, present, and future enables us to gain new vision and understanding. There is a continuity of past, present, and future as we perceive more clearly that rational pattern and that self. However, there is also a movement and dynamic, a living process that revelation illuminates and from which we derive meaning as the meaning of our inner past, present, and future unfolds through revelation.

5. Meaning in Relation to the Revealed Self

a. Meaning Found in the I-Thou Relation. Following the same way of relating the discussion of Revelation to the

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[83]Ibid.

[84]Ibid., p. 101.

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search for meaning we follow Niebuhr's arguments in consideration of the content of revelation through which meaning is found. Niebuhr is clear that while revelation provides a rational pattern and image that is adequate, this is not the extent of revelation's significance:

> But the rational value of revelation is not its first value and its validation in the reasoning heart is not the primary validation.[85]

In the terms of our theme we might say that meaning is not something that can be found nor ultimately validated in a concept, theory, proposition, object, or bit of history, because revelation does not stop there. As we have seen revelation deals with selves in their relatedness and therefore the content of revelation must be the revelation of a "self." Meaning must ultimately be found in relation to this self.

In this context Niebuhr discusses revelation in human "I-Thou" relationships and from that draws an analogy to what the revelation of God must also imply. Knowing an object (I-It relation) the knower is the impersonal active agent and the object is the passive, the manipulated. In an I-Thou relationship we must speak of "revelation" in which there is a two-way revealing; knowing, and being known. First, we can not come to know another self in the same way we can come to know an object. To know another self, that self must reveal itself--most clearly in some actions. Secondly, to know another self, we must also do some revealing: "We can not know here save as we are known."[86] And as we become known

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[85]Ibid.

[86]Ibid., p. 106.

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by another we come to know ourselves through the eyes of the other. We are changed by seeing our selves from a new and different perspective and by coming to know another self. Finally, there is involved here a level of commitment to the other in an I-Thou relationship, and a commitment to the self that is known by the other;one must come to a degree of self-acceptance with that self-knowledge.

b. This "Self" is neither Jesus nor One's "Self".

When this analogy of human relationship is applied to revelation, then, the question is asked: what is this "self" that is revealed in revelation such that "...we gain a certainty which forces us to seek an intelligible unity in all our life as selves?"[87] Niebuhr rules out both Jesus and the self (i.e. finding the ultimate certainty in human worth). By Jesus Niebuhr means the historical figure who can only be found in letters, documents, and books which are the content of our memory; hardly the personal reality necessary to revelation. An extension of this would be to try to locate that personal reality in the church which is his extended life. But this can become the basis for the community's self-glorification and self-justification. Furthermore, identifying revelation as the self-disclosure of Jesus indicates that this in itself needs a prior certainty and therefore is not adequate. In terms of our theme, again, meaning ultimately can not be found primarily in relation to Jesus. Jesus reveals something which is beyond his own historical existence.

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[87]Ibid., p. 107.

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Secondly, Niebuhr rules out the sacredness of the human self as that which is revealed in revelation. Again, this would require some prior certainty:

> It cannot be true that the proposition about the infinite worth of persons is self-evident unless there be some infinite being to whom they are valuable.[88]

> It is very true that recognition of the infinite value of souls is a concomitant of revelation but it could not be given were not something else given in that event--the infinite self for whom all things are valuable.[89]

Meaning can not be found in relation to the person of Jesus or the self. Ultimately meaning must be found in relation to God. Using the I-Thou relationship analogy, it can be found in relationship to God who reveals Godself in our history as the one who knows us. It can not be found in relation to some numinous feelings or supernatural knowledge but in relation to a self, God. Jesus reveals this God, or perhaps, we should say, through the Jesus event God reveals Godself. Finally, meaning and value are found and known when we experience ourselves as found, valued and known by the source of all meaning and value, and when we commit ourselves to, and accept this valued self which is known by God. Herein we see the doctrine of Justification by Faith which would suggest our value is found not in the first instance in anything we do, but in that we are valued and loved by God. This of course is known by faith, which, as we have mentioned before, involves loyalty, confidence, and trust. From this point on, all meaning is realized in relationship to God because of revelation:

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[88]Ibid., p. 110. [89]Ibid., p. 111.

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> When we speak of revelation we mean that moment when we are given new faith, to cleave to and to betray, and a new standard, to follow and deny. Now when we fail in faith, we fail in this faith; and when we transgress, it is this person we transgress against; when we reason falsely, it is in violation of the first principle given in this event.[90]

6. Our Meaning is Found in the Revolution of Revelation

a. The Revolution of our Moral Law. As we have followed Niebuhr's discussion of the meaning of revelation, we have noted suggestions for our search for meaning. We have seen how revelation is the means by which we discover meaning in our past, present, and future. We have also come to see that our meaning in the Christian faith is found in relationship to the self that is disclosed in revelation.

The final note to be made in this section has to do with how this self-disclosure entails a revolution in our understanding and application of the moral law, and a revolution in our knowledge of God. In the midst of this revolution what is truly of value and worth is to be discovered.

In our search for meaning the matter of morality is crucial. What is important is to see how revelation means a revolution in the understanding and application of the moral law. Niebuhr reminds us that our inner imperatives and our social laws, while they may seem like divine decrees, are quite explainable by social sciences and the methods of external history. They are informed by a variety of sources and colored by a spectrum of human motivations and needs.

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[90] Ibid., p. 112.

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Niebuhr, then, sees that within us there is some moral standard prior to any identification of such with God's will.

> In general, then, Kant seems to be right; we know an act to be our duty before we know it to be the will of God.[91]

1) In the Imperative of our Laws. Revelation, as God's self-disclosure of both person and will causes a revolution in this natural law. To begin with, revelation causes a change in the "imperativeness" of the moral laws. The 'ought' of a situation is no longer solely prescribed by what we think, or what reason determines, or even what society thinks we ought to do. Our failure to fulfill the "ought" is no longer a breach of any of these, but a breach of our relation to the God of all from whom there is no escape. It reveals the One to whom we are ultimately responsible.

2) In their Extensiveness and Intensiveness. Secondly, revelation means that the moral law must be applied more extensively and intensively. It cannot be limited to any particular sphere of our making. The demand upon us is made in relation to all people, pushing beyond our in-group, our values, even our time. The moral law now must be applied to all things, times, people, and places. It is the living God, the God of all creation, of all time, to whom our morality must respond.

3) In the Rebirth of Moral Law. Thirdly, moral law, is reborn. It is both criticized and made new. It reveals

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[91] Ibid., p. 119.

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our law to be self-centered, self-motivated, and/or idolatrous. We manipulate the law to our own purposes:

> When God becomes the will behind the moral law a great process of leveling takes place, all the mountains are brought low and the valleys are all exalted. A revolutionary transvaluation occurs not in addition to the personal revelation but because of it. It may be better to say that a restoration is begun, for in the presence of the person we recognize that the moral law, as we had entertained it, was always a corrupted thing, that there never was in our conscience, in our philosophies, or on our statute books a law which was not in service to some deity.[92]

We know this because in revelation we come to know ourselves and all our efforts to be tainted with sin and limitation.

4) In the Conversion of the Imperative into the Indicative. Finally, Niebuhr speaks of the "conversion of the imperative into an indicative and of the law, whose content is love, into a free love of God and (man)". Niebuhr does not discuss this in this context except to say it is a change which exists more as a promise and potential than as a present reality. I take him to mean that through the revelation of Jesus the morality becomes not so much adherence to legal regulations as the loving response of a free self to God and neighbor.

If our meaning is to be found in relationship to the self disclosed in revelation, then surely knowing and doing the will of that self, God, is essential. As Niebuhr has noted, through revelation we come to know the divine person who revolutionizes our natural moral inclinations and laws.

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[92]Ibid., p. 123.

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Revelation does not refer here to the giving of stone tablet or paper upon which is delineated the will of God but to a process of relativizing, criticizing, extending, universalizing, making new, and converting this moral law given to us by a variety of sources:

> In loose usage we may extend the term revelation to cover the reconstruction of the moral law but if we would speak accurately we must say that revelation is the beginning of a revolutionary understanding and application of the moral law rather than the giving of a new law.[93]

This process of conversion naturally applies also to our beliefs and opinions of the world of nature and about history. While further explanation of this seems tangential perhaps a reference would suffice to show the comparison.

> Revelation imparts no new beliefs about natural or historical facts; it does involve the radical reconstruction of all beliefs since those always reflect both human provincialism and concern for self with its idols as well as objective knowledge.[94]

b) Revolution in Our Knowledge of God

1) Conversion of our Natural Will to God. Having discussed how revelation presents us with the revolution of what we know "about" God, we now turn to how it revolutionizes our knowledge "of" God; revelation, for Niebuhr, must mean both knowledge "of" God (in meeting the divine self) and knowledge "about" God (found in statements of truth and of God's will, moral law). Here again the line of argument follows the same pattern. Religion, like moral law, is something which seems inherent to human nature quite apart from any

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[93]Ibid., p. 125 [94]Ibid.

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revelation (in this context we might include "the search for meaning seems inherent to human nature. . ."). Again, there are a whole variety of possible sources for our beliefs about the source and goal of our life, which philosophy and the sciences might point out; including "racial unconsciousness" and our own desires, wants and needs; for example:

> They show us how we cannot think at all about our world save as something with a beginning and end, a cosmos issuing from a sufficient reason and tending toward a sufficient goal. When they take seriously our sense of values and of moral law they include for us in the sufficient cause a source of value, and in the end a being who unites worthiness to exist with existence. Back of all other arguments for the existence of deity, they indicate, there lies the importunate demand of practical reason for a reality which will conserve selves with their values.[95]

In other words our directedness toward God may be explained, quite apart from revelation, by psycho-socio-biological explanations. Or, to sum up briefly, using Niebuhr's words again: "By and large, religion has its source in human nature."[96]

Revelation is, as is the case with the moral law, the revolution, the conversion of our natural religion. (May we not also conclude it is the conversion of our search for meaning?) It does not present new truths or the elimination of our natural religion. It does suggest a process in which this natural religion is changed and converted:

> "It is the fulfillment and radical reconstruction of our natural knowledge about deity through revelation of one whom Jesus Christ called "father."[97]

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[95]Ibid., p. 130.

[96]Ibid., p. 131.

[97]Ibid., p. 133.

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Niebuhr gives three areas in which this revolution works: unity, power, and goodness of God in revelation.

2) Revolution in our Knowledge of God's Unity. In revelation is disclosed the unity of a self that amounts to the conversion of all our natural ideas, concepts and attempts at unity. It shows the principles and purposes we use to unify our lives to be inadequate and self-centered. It demands". . .the reformation of every particular idea of unity we have, and the making of a new beginning in our effort to understand (his) nature."[98] The unity of this self is no entity of a static established order; it is not that of a super god over a host of lesser gods; it is not the sum of our many values and purposes. Rather it is the unity of a will that is beyond the many conditioned beings, things, and events, and yet meets us in all of these--a will directed toward the unity of all things and calling us to be directed towards God's purposes in "singleness of mind and purity of heart."

3) Revolution in our Knowledge of God's Power. In our understanding of God's power revelation again causes a conversion. The God whom we encounter in Jesus Christ both fulfills and destroys our expectations of God's power. When we speak of God we expect that God is powerful. This power must be, to qualify for us as "God," connected to God's goodness; without power goodness can not be something to

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[98]Ibid., p. 134.

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depend upon, to pray to, to trust in; without goodness certainly power can not be God: "Deity, whatever else it must be to be deity, must be powerful in its goodness as well as good in its power."[99] The God of Jesus is the all-powerful creator, God of life and death, the power "of" goodness and the power "in" goodness. While God fulfills these expectations revelation also challenges and changes our natural understandings of strength and power. The power of God as revealed in Christ is the weakness of the cross:

> We see the power of God over the strong of the earth made evident not in the fact that (he) slays them, but in (his) making the spirit of the slain Jesus unconquerable. Death is not the manifestation of power; there is a power behind and in the power of death that is stronger than death. . .(he) exercises(his) sovereignty more in crosses than through thrones.[100]

4) Revolution in our Knowledge of God's Goodness.

The final area in which revelation effects revolution (which Niebuhr discusses in this context) has particular relevance to our theme. Revelation sets in motion a continual conversion of all our understandings of God's goodness and value, and thereby we would conclude, in our entire enterprise of the search for meaning and value. Revelation both fulfills and destroys all our natural search for value, our expectations of, and need for, value and good. First of all our natural religion would demand that its god be not only powerful, but also good and worthy of our trust and loyalty; else we would not "stake the meaning of our life" on devotion to

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[99]Ibid., p. 135. [100]Ibid., p. 136.

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it.[101] Goodness and power must be inseparable for us to make that kind of investment and commitment; "God must be value," as Niebuhr says. Furthermore the value and goodness of our God must be both intrinsic and instrumental: worshipped for its own sake, but also because it is useful to our purposes; that which is worshipped and adored as good and worthy must also be that which has the capacity for the "protection and nurture of other intrinsic goods."[102] If these are not united in one reality then we are reduced to a polytheism in which one god fulfills the intrinsic, and another god fulfills the instrumental values. Any unity of God must include them both: "If deity is one it needs to combine with power an adorable and a ministering goodness."[103]

With these needs and expectations we come in search of value and good. These are fulfilled in the revelation of God in Jesus: "For whose sake all life and every life is worth living, even lives that seem bereft of beauty, of truth and all goodness."[104] However, revelation moves beyond just the fulfillment of our natural religion, our natural search for meaning, goodness and value. Where we sought an idea, or ideal, we encounter a self whose goodness is that of love and the expression of love: "We sought a good to love and were found by a good that loved us."[105] In this our search for good, value, and meaning is shown for what it is: an attempt to save our own necks, to preserve value and meaning

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[101] Ibid. [102] Ibid., p. 137. [103] Ibid.

[104] Ibid. [105] Ibid., p. 138.

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for ourselves: "to keep ourselves with the love of our good in the center of the picture."[106] Through revelation we discover instead a reality that loves us in a selfless way, pouring itself out unreservedly. Our natural search for meaning is not voided by this but simply seen in its self-centeredness and sin. Revelation sets in motion the permanent conversion of any such search for meaning and value. We find value not in our efforts, not in our searching and striving to find meaning. Instead meaning begins with the discovery that God values us and that our value derives from that.

In light of revelation all the objects, people and places that we lable "good" undergo a conversion of worth: "transvaluation." This process, Niebuhr suggests, is one of upheaval and turmoil as all our valuations are turned upside down:

> The self we loved is not the self God loves, the neighbors we did not prize are (his) treasures, the truth we ignored is the truth (he) maintains, the justice which we sought because it was our own is not the justice that (his) love desires. The righteousness (he) demands and gives is not our righteousness but greater and different.[107]

This transvaluation involves a painful process of sacrifice and letting go all those people, places, and things by which we judge ourselves to be worthy, valuable and good, and surrendering our meaning and purpose in life to the one and only true value and love. What we thought to be so important --our self-justification, our clean conscience, our self-confidence, our peace and happiness--fades in our centering

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[106] Ibid. [107] Ibid.

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upon the one who grants us forgiveness, repentance, absolution and faith. We enter the exciting, though often painful, process of permanent revolution and finally hope.[108]

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[108] Ibid.

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APPENDIX

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LEADERS GUIDE

This leaders guide is designed to be an integration of the material presented in the previous chapters. That integration will take place in the context of a small group study plan to include seven group meetings. The group sessions draw from Robert C. Leslie's book Jesus and Logotherapy[1] for many of their ideas and scriptural references. Each session seeks to combine spiritual development and deepening in prayer life, the building of a community of love, trust and fellowship, the integration of insights from Frankl and Niebuhr, scriptural foundations, and suggestions for opportunities to deal with the material experientially as well as cognitively.

The sessions are written as lesson plans to a group leader. It is assumed that the suggestions for exercises and activities must be adapted and adjusted to each group depending on the age level and interest of the group. It should be noted that the material was written in such a way that the leader could simply read it aloud. If this seems too formal it would of course be much better if the leader could digest the material and present it in her or his own words. It might even be possible to abstract the input material from

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[1]Robert C. Leslie, Jesus and Logotherapy (Nashville: Abingdon, 1965).

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its present form and put it in a form which the group could read themselves and then discuss. Let the group leader be sensitive to the needs of the group and adjust the material and its presentation accordingly. The first three chapters of the project are intended to provide the group leader with an abundance of resource material on Frankl and Niebuhr for the leader to draw upon.

The sessions are the result of having presented this group design on two prior occasions and have naturally undergone numerous evolutionary changes. I wish to thank the people of the United Methodist Church of Montclair and of Twentynine Palms who contributed to its present form and content by their participation and feedback.

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Session I

THE SEARCH FOR MEANING

A. Opening. (10 minutes maximum)

1. Relaxation. With the group in a circle do a simple relaxation exercise. For example, take them through the following process: have them seated; feet flat on the floor; hands on thighs; eyes closed; begin deep regular breathing with a few exaggerated breaths to clear out the system; tense and relax each part of the body beginning with the feet --tensing on inhale, relaxing on the exhale; have them be aware of feelings and thoughts which may come to mind as relaxation occurs.

2. Remembering the day in Prayer: Suggest that people remember back to the start of their day and run forward, in their minds, to the present through the day's activities, encounters, feelings, unfinished business. Sometimes initial feelings or experiences may tend to "determine" our feelings for the day. We need to take responsibility for these. Lift each part of the day before God in prayer silently.

3. As silence is difficult for some at first, err on the side of brevity this first session--perhaps only five minutes total! This can always be increased later as is desirable.

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B. Introductions. (try to hold this to 25 minutes. You may need to break into two groups if there are more than 10 in the group)

1. Begin on a non-threatening note! We need not play into persons' natural resistance to any new experience. It is important, I think, to be sensitive to initial feelings of participants, to give each a chance to break the ice by saying something (however little), and to have a sense of initial affirmation for each person in the group.

2. Icebreaking. A variety of icebreaking group techniques are available to group leaders; all must be adapted to a given group with regard to its needs and desires.

a. Singing is always good if the leader knows there are singers in the group and if there is a solid accompaniment on a musical instrument. Otherwise, it can be disasterous and frustrating to participants.

b. One suggestion used often is to pair off, give a few minutes to get to know each other and then come back to the circle and introduce your partner. To keep this from turning into a "facts trivia" exercise, suggest that each person try to discover some additional specific information. For example:

1) Suggest they find out what their partner likes about groups like this and what she or he does not like about such groups--or does not want to see happen.

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2) Have them learn what the other person is hoping to get out of this group.

3) Perhaps without explicitly asking, they might try to sense what kind of a day their partner had.

4) Suggest they ask their partner to share a time when meaning and value were particularly intense.

Suggestions like these might hopefully move the group beyond just the "external history" of an individual, as Niebuhr would say, and progress to the "internal history" where meaning is to be found.

C. Small Group Design. (10 minutes)

1. Present an outline of topics and passages to be considered over the next several sessions.

2. Decide on time; place, length for each meeting, and number of sessions.

3. Give an opportunity for feedback; the group needs an opportunity to freely choose, alter, or even reject the design if it is to become "their" group.

4. The Spiritual Diary. A useful tool in reflecting on and realizing meaning in our lives is the diary. While this is not something the leader or other group members would see, discoveries might be shared if an individual wished. Otherwise it would remain private. The function of the diary is to help us see God's working in our lives. It will assist the individual in discerning the "intelligible pattern,"

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extrapolating from Niebuhr, of God's revealing, converting process in our lives: causing conversion in our moral existence and in our relationship to God; God's unity, power, and goodness. The suggestion is that people set aside time for prayer each day and for jotting down even a few notes about what God has been "showing" them, revealing to them that day, or that week, or month.

D. Background. (approximately 10 minutes)

The following is input material which may be read aloud to the group by the leader (or presented in some form).

The issue of meaning in life is one that affects many people. It is an issue which is given special attention by a man named Viktor Frankl, a professor of psychiatry and neurology at the University of Vienna. Dr. Frankl confronted this issue acutely in his own life through three horrible years in Nazi concentration camps and Nazi prisons during World War II. His book, Man's Search for Meaning, recounts his experience in these camps. During those grim and tortured years, he struggled with the question of how, in a situation where every possession had been lost, every token of human decency negated, every human value stepped upon, where suffering from the conditions of hunger, cold, and brutality was a daily experience, he could find life worth preserving, worth living? In this setting he discovered that when he had been stripped, mentally, emotionally and physically, of every evidence of human dignity there was still the last of human

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freedoms: the freedom to choose one's attitude towards one's unavoidable suffering and even death.

With this discovery he developed, even without the harshness of that prison setting, an understanding of what it was to be essentially "human." He clung to the idea that what made the human being more than an "animal" was the capacity to exercise this freedom toward the realization, the actualization, of meaning and value in our life. He rebelled against the idea that we are determined by our social or biological condition; determined by drives and instincts. He argued for a spiritual dimension of the human self which through freedom and responsibility could discover and choose to live, suffer, and even die meaningfully. He maintained that what is most uniquely "human" about us is what he called the search for meaning. When this meaning is fulfilled in our lives, then our potentials are realized and our most important needs are met as a by-product (not as the goal) of that fulfillment. And, when meaning is absent, our lives are empty of meaning, then our physical, social, economic, emotional needs may be well cared for, and yet there will be a gnawing emptiness that will dog us.

H. Richard Niebuhr brings to this issue the perspectives of the Christian faith. He too notes the significance of the issue. For example, he writes of Tolstoi:

> At every point the question "But why?" or, as we might say, "so what?" intruded itself into Tolstoi's deliberations. Whether he thought about his estate, about the thousands of acres and hundreds of horses he owned, or about the education of his children, or about his literary activities, he always returned to the question of

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> meaning. So what? "What if I should be more famous than Gogol, Pushkin, Shakespeare, Moliere--than all the writers of the world--well, and what then?" He felt, he wrote, that the ground on which he stood was crumbling, that what he had been living for was nothing, that he had no reason for living.
>
> "The truth was," said Tolstoi, "that life was meaningless."[2]

For this Christian theologian the issue of meaning must be framed within the context of our faith in God who is the source of all being and value. Niebuhr would have us look carefully at where we put our trust and loyalty and suggests that it is such misguided, misdirected faith which brings the sense of emptiness and anxiety to the fore. The crisis of meaning is a crisis of faith.

So we recognize that at points of "social conflict, personal disintegration and death,"[3] at crisis points in our lives the issue of meaning confronts us as an issue of our faith in a critical way. Enumerating some of these might clarify and personalize the points at which "meaning" questions sometimes become acute:

--At time of death: What is its meaning for me? How do I make sense of this loss? The loss of a loved one sometimes, indeed, leaves a vacuum as a major center of meaning and value is gone.

--When the kids leave home: What will be the center of meaning and purpose now that my parent role is decreased?

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[2]H. Richard Niebuhr, Radical Monotheism and Western Culture (New York: Harper & Row, 1960) pp. 19-20.

[3]Donald E. Fadner, The Responsible God (Missoula, MT: Scholars, 1975) p. 137.

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--At retirement: Sometimes people's lives, loyalties, and source of personal value are so locked into their jobs that retirement brings crisis in meaning.

--Children growing up: They are making choices about what will be important to them; about how they will act, where they will spend their time, by what will they judge themselves and and their lives meaningful, valuable?

--Youth making career choices: Do I go for what will bring in the money, or for what will be fulfilling?

--Young adults making decisions: Marriage? Children? Career? Where will I invest my trust and loyalty?

--Hospitalization or illness: Often calls into question our life's value--what does it all add up to? Has it been worth it? Is it worth continuing on? Where is my life going?

--Career changes: Unemployment at extreme heights in our country causes such a crisis in personal value and meaning.

--The nuclear arms race: How do we find value and meaning in a situation where all of our efforts may be for naught, vaporized in a fire storm of nuclear destruction! How do we find meaning in the context of such a total and complete elimination of all our values of past, present and future.

It is in such moments of transition, passage, or crisis that "God" who may have seemed quite absent, or irrelevant suddenly becomes an issue. While we may have been sliding along avoiding the issue of the ultimate meaning of our lives, suddenly we find ourselves confronted and indeed it sometimes feels like "the ground on which we have been

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standing is crumbling." Perhaps we, through Niebuhr, can confront this issue now before our source of security and devotion crumble.

Over the next several weeks we will explore the issue of meaning in our lives using the resources and perspectives of these two people. However, we will also seek to put this in the context of the Biblical witness and of our experience as a Christian community.

--At this point pause for questions, comments, discussion. (hereabouts perhaps a brief stretch!)

E. Scripture study.

The scripture text for this session is found in two gospels: Matthew 4:1-11, and Luke 4:1-13. We will follow the Lukan text:

1. Outline of the text:

   a. Setting the stage (4:1-2b)
      1) Led by the spirit into the wilderness
      2) Forty days
      3) A period of temptation
      4) Jesus is fasting
   b. The Narrative action (4:2c-13)
      1) The first Temptation: to fill immediate needs (vs 3-4)
         a) Devil's invitation: "command this bread"
         b) Jesus' response: ". . .shall not live by bread alone"
      2) Second Temptation: temptation to power (vs 5-8)
         a) Devil's invitation: "all this authority"
         b) Jesus' response: "Him only shall you serve"
      3) Third Temptation: (vs 9-12)
         a) Devil's invitation: "throw yourself down"
         b) Jesus' response: "shall not tempt the Lord."
      4) Devil departs: not seen again until it enters Judas.

2. Interpretation. (The following paragraph might be read aloud by the leader)

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Robert C. Leslie in Jesus and Logotherapy has described these verses in this way:

> A classic description of the internal struggle going on in each (man's) soul is given in the record of the temptation of Jesus. The temptation experience is not only a clarification of the principles by which Jesus chose to govern his own life: it is also an account of the basic choices that confront every person as (he) steps from the shelter of the family into the arena of life.[4]

One way to understand this passage, then, is to see it as the experience of Jesus facing some of the most central issues of life. His responses to them laid the foundational principles of decision making for his life and ministry.

a. Discussion. At this point there are several possibilities depending upon the will, interests, and flow of the group.

They may simply want to freely discuss what they see to be the main issues raised in the temptations:

--The temptation to focus our lives around the achievement of physical needs and wants; to put our immediate wants and needs first in our lives.

--The temptation to seek power and status, prestige, and position as our "center," our primary goal.

--The temptation to put self in the center of our search for meaning.

b. Concluding statement: (again for the leader to read)

A theme which runs through all of these is that of the search for meaning. In Frankl's perspective the focus

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[4]Leslie, p. 13.

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on power, pleasure, and self-actualization are inadequate to fill that more primary will to meaning. For Niebuhr these temptations consist in the presentation of false centers of value which are again inadequate and evil. In each of Jesus' responses can be seen his single-minded devotion to the "one beyond the man." He does not center his faith in himself or even in his special relationship as the "son of God." The center of faith, and thus of meaning, is not himself, but God. Niebuhr would suggest that for us too our center of faith and loyalty can not be our own self, or even Jesus, but the "self" that Jesus reveals and points us to--God alone.

c. Exercise. If there is time, and the group discussion allows, a possible exercise to get in touch with our "centers of value" is for members to write down on a card the 10 most important "loves" of their lives. These can be prioritized and shared in pairs or as a group if time permits. The group might discuss: How does our relationship to God affect these centers of devotion?

F. Closing.

1. Try to give some time for any feelings, debriefing, feedback which people may have.

2. Close with prayer in a circle.

3. Remind folks about the diary, next meeting time and place.

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Session II

THE SEARCH FOR THE CENTER OF VALUE

A. Opening. (15-20 minutes)

1. Start with some activity to get reconnected. For example:

a. Have everyone stand in a circle facing in one direction for a quick back rub; then reverse direction and suggest they rub their other neighbor's back. Before leaving the circle (and perhaps while still back rubbing) sing a line or a chorus of a familiar hymn or camp song. Still in that position close this period with a prayer.

2. Without taking too long (or as feels comfortable with the group) ask members to describe their mood, day, or feeling with a color. For example, a person might give the color purple and say something like "Purple is a good color for me today. For me that color has the feel of a mixture of feelings but mostly depths of struggling and hurt." This often-used exercise gives each a chance to say something and to verbalize feelings with which they may come to group. At the opening of only the second meeting people may not risk too much, but the opportunity may be valuable for someone who really needs to express something. It is also important for "revealing," and it helps the intimacy level as people share who they are

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on progressively deeper levels. Also, self awareness is important if we are to take responsibility for our feelings in the group. The exercise encourages that.

B. Review. (this may be read aloud by the leader)

1. Last week we introduced the topic of the search for meaning in our lives. We spoke of instances in our lives where meaning and purpose came to the fore: birth, death, illness, marriage, divorce, career planning, national crises, etc.

2. We noted the work of Viktor Frankl and H. Richard Niebuhr as two authors whose work might serve as a resource for us. We noted that for Frankl meaning is not just an issue that arises at moments of crisis, but is the primary motivating factor in our lives--something which we need in order to feel fulfilled as human beings. We noted that Niebuhr brings to this question the perspective of the Christian faith which also sees the search for meaning to be basic to human life and locates the fulfillment of that meaning in a relationship to the one, true source of all meaning and value--God.

3. Finally we took a look at the Temptations of Jesus as a biblical example of our search for meaning. Where will we seek meaning? What will we center our lives around?

(Any questions, thoughts, or discoveries which have arisen since the last session may be shared.)

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C. Background. (Being open to questions at each point) (read aloud)

This week we will delve deeper into the search for meaning from the faith perspective of H. Richard Niebuhr.

Perhaps we should start by defining what we mean by faith. For Niebuhr faith is more than intellectual agreement to a doctrinal formulation. For example, one may intellectually believe that Jesus did heal people without having faith in Jesus. Faith involves primarily two things: trust and loyalty. It is trust in someone or something that gives the trustor value and significance. For example, we trust that our friends love us, care about us, value us to the extent that they would not violate or betray us. But faith must get beyond just trust and confidence. It must also be loyalty. Again in the example of friendship faith means being faithful. It means that we love our friends, we value them and are loyal to them. Faith is trust and loyalty in some value center.

What becomes evident in this definition is that we have faith with regard to a lot of people, institutions, societies and groups. In a sense we have a lot of centers of value; perhaps we could even say we have a lot of gods. For example, the patriotic nationalist says, "I was born to die for my country!" For her or him the nation has become the source of value and personal worth. She or he puts "trust" in it to give significance to her or his life and activities. Loyalty is also given to it and determines what

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actions are "right" and "wrong". Everything becomes centered around this primary source and focus of "faith." It becomes a "god."

All of us have "faith" in "something" or "someone"--all of us place confidence and trust somewhere, in some center of value. We may reject a supernatural "God" but all of us have some center or centers of value. We may choose one center, as in nationalism, or we may choose several centers. The feeling of being pulled in all directions by the many things and people we give our allegiance to is a good evidence of that. We may try to place that center in our selves and center the world around "me." We may, finally, try to center our lives around some ideal like peace, justice, truth, or beauty.

The Christian faith suggests that there is only one true, ultimate, adequate, and truly good center of faith: the God of Jesus Christ. This God is the "one beyond all the many" various centers which we construct and in which we place trust and loyalty. This is the God who is above all relative, finite value centers, and who eventually brings them down to nothing through the natural processes of death and degeneration. In this sense God is initially experienced as the enemy of all our finite, relative objects, causes, people and ideas in which we try to center our meaning, be they persons, institutions, governments, or causes. All of these will eventually fade and fail us as ultimate value centers. All other gods must and will eventually die.

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Jesus Christ, his life, death, and resurrection, presents us with a revelation of the true nature of God, not as the "enemy", but as the companion who wants only our good. Jesus' resurrection demonstrates the faithfulness of God as the one who preserves all worth and whose goodness goes beyond even death. Jesus' resurrection reveals human nature in its potential for faithfulness; to remain trusting and loyal even unto death. Finally Jesus reveals a God who is intimately involved in human suffering and who shares that suffering which is the result of our freedom. In Jesus we see one who put total trust and loyalty in God and one who received God's faithfulness and loyalty in the resurrection. It is the revelation of God in Jesus which brings us face to face with the ultimate reality, and which brings about a conversion of our natural faith in finite and relative centers of value to faith in the "one beyond the many."

It is important to note that the revelation that all things are "relative" and less than God--that there is only one God--means both the secularization of all things, and the sanctification of all things. A relative reality, like the church for example, is not to be worshipped and elevated to the position of God. It is an institution of human making and with human limitations and sinfulness. However, the relative can be the earthen vessels, the vehicles, the channels for God's spirit. Through them the sacred can be known and experienced. It is through human form that God is in fact revealed.

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The conclusion we reach from this is that indeed we do have many centers of value to which we are committed and from which we derive meaning. There are many excellent causes to support and to become involved in. The difficulty comes when we seek meaning in one or more of these in an absolute way. The minister for example has an important job. However, when that job becomes an obsession to the devaluation of all else (family) it becomes a perversion of its rightful place in the minister's life. This relativism furthermore places our value centers in proper perspective. For example, many churches exist in our society. I cannot participate in them all; I must choose, for I am relative and finite. The choice is between many relative values. The United Methodist Church recognizes its sinfulness and limitation as well as its potential for being a vehicle of God's spirit, because of revelation. It knows it is not the one and only church of Jesus the Christ. Ultimately our value comes from the fact that we are valued by the source and creator of all being and value. Ultimately our "need for God" our "will to meaning" can only be satisfied in relationship to God. It is in this relationship that all the relative things, "the many," find their rightful place as vehicles for God, but not as God.

Niebuhr treats the issue of the search for meaning within the context of our faith in the many value centers of our lives. He suggests that to be faithful to the faith and way of Jesus, we too must place our ultimate trust in, and give our ultimate loyalty to the one God--the only true source

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of value and meaning. God is the only true fulfillment of that which is most basic to our human nature--in Frankl's terms our will to meaning and our search for meaning.

(Open for questions, comments, discussion)

D. Scripture Study.

1. Outline of the text: Woman at the Well. John 4: 1-30 (This might be outlined on a chalk board or poster paper to facilitate its review)

a. Introduction: vs 1-4
   1) Conflict with Pharisees
   2) Jesus leaves Judea for Galilee

2. Jesus and the Samaritan Woman

a. Setting the Scene: vs 5-6
   1) Pass through Samaria
   2) The spot: Jacobs well
   3) Jesus tired from journey
   4) Sits down next to well
   5) It was mid-day; hot

b. Jesus asks for water: vs 7-9
   1) Disciples had gone for food
   2) Woman reacts to his request: (Jewish-Samaritan feud)

c. Jesus speaks of "living water"; vs 10-15
   1) Woman questions how and where he gets such "living water"
      a) Is he greater than Jacob?
      b) This well has satisfied animal and person alike
   2) Jesus says this well water does not give lasting satisfaction (fulfillment)
      a) His water will truly quench one's "thirst"
      b) It will become an "inner spring"
   3) The woman asks for this water (now it is she asking for water)

d. Jesus speaks to the woman's inner condition (her need, "thirst") vs. 16-19
   1) Jesus sees through to her situation
      a) Asks to see husband; she denies having <u>one</u>
      b) He challenges her: "you have 5"
   2) Woman recognizes him as a prophet

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e. Jesus reveals himself to her: vs. 20-26
   1) Discussion about true worship
   2) "I who speak to you am he."

3. Conclusion: vs 27-30

   a. Disciples astonishment over his talking with a woman
   b. The woman's witness

4. Interpretation (read aloud)

In this story there is an exchange between Jesus and a Samaritan woman. Jesus steps across the social taboos of sex and religious differences. He offers her "living water"--a truly satisfying source of life. He points to the source of her emptiness--a life centered around inadequate ways of finding love and value. He reveals himself.

How could we describe the condition of this woman as Jesus meets her at the well? (invite response) (list) (a) She is alienated from her community: she arrives at mid-day to avoid the jeers and ridicule of the other women who come in the cool of the morning to do their wash and draw water; she is not welcome among them. (b) She is a person, like us, who wants something that will truly satisfy. (c) She has sought this in numerous unfulfilling relationships all of which have failed to bring love and meaning to her life. (d) She wants something that will end the frustrating repetition of this search, as represented by the endless drudgery of going for water.

One commentator on this passage (Bultmann) has suggested that our immediate needs, for example hunger and thirst, in fact point us beyond ourselves to something more primary:

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> Yet each time (man) feels this need it only points (him) to the fact that (he) wants to live. When (he) hungers and thirsts, then fundamentally (he) does not desire this or that thing but (he) wants to live. The real object of (his) desire is not water and bread but something that will give (him) life and will rescue (him) from death, something which might therefore be called real water, real bread.[5]

Another way we might put this is that our search for life and for life's meaning is our most primary need. To be really alive, to live!, is to discover and receive that something or someone that is the true source of being and value.

5. Application. (read aloud)

a. The Samaritan woman experienced an emptiness, an inner vacuum, which she had tried again and again to fill.

Break into pairs and share an experience in your life where there was a real sense of meaninglessness. What were the circumstances? What affect did it have on you?--Feelings. How did you try to fill this vacuum?

Then share a time when your life overflowed with a sense of meaning, significance and personal worth: again, what were the circumstances? What were your feelings?

(As you join again in the circle give an opportunity for any feed back or response. For example,

--Some may not feel they ever fully regained a sense of value and meaning.

--It is important to note that this is an on-going concern; meaning in life may change.

--There is no "pat" answer for how one deals with this inner emptiness.

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[5]Rudlolf Bultmann, The Gospel of John (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1971) p. 185.

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--Some may have found that their meaning had nothing to do with their personal wealth or comfort.
--Some may even have found it at moments of great personal suffering.)

b. (read aloud) Meaning does fill this primary emptiness in our lives and can affect all areas of our lives. Frankl notes the life of the great German poet Goethe who died at age 83 just two months after completing Faust,

> I dare say that the final several years of his life he biologically lived beyond his means. His death was overdue but he lived up to the moment in which his work was completed and meaning fulfilled.[6]

We are also familiar with people who seem to die prematurely; e.g. following retirement. Sometimes their whole center of meaning and worth is so wrapped up in their work that once this is gone their reason for living is gone. Frankl notes Nietzsche's saying, "He who has a why to live for can bear with almost any how."[7] In terms of Niebuhr's theology we might say that when limited and finite centers of value are chosen as the absolute center, they will eventually fail us. God is the only true center that will satisfy our primary need for meaning and value.

c. (read aloud) One exercise which may help to clarify the primary and secondary needs in our lives might be to simply list each. (list on blackboard as participants volunteer what they see to be their primary and secondary

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[6]Viktor Frankl, "Existential Dynamics and Neurotic Escapism" p. 30, quoted in Leslie, p. 48.

[7]Ibid., p. 47.

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needs.) A definition of a secondary need might be that which is a by-product of a more primary need. Immediate needs are not bad in and of themselves, but their proper place is not as the focus of our lives. When they are sought in and of themselves they begin to become the center of our trust and loyalty. Christian faith can have only one center.

The Samaritan woman sought something that would meet her most primary need. Jesus pointed her to God.

E. Closing.

1. Give an opportunity for any last comments, feelings, or feedback.

2. Closing prayer, or period of silence concluded by the Lord's Prayer.

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Session III

THE SEARCH FOR MEANING VS. THE SEARCH FOR SELF-FULFILLMENT

A. Opening.

1. Explain that there are various ways of praying:
--Praying with eyes closed to block out the distractions of the surroundings;
--Praying with eyes open to raise consciousness of the world around you and include that as part of prayer;
--Praying with hands together as symbolic statement of servitude; the idea of hands being bound together by one's "lord" in ancient times now symbolizes our attitude of servitude to our "Lord";
--Praying with hands lifted up;
--Praying out loud;
--Praying silently to ourselves.

2. Suggest that the group take a moment in silence and then offer one-word prayers of thanksgiving, and of concern; i.e. they may not use sentences, only one word.

B. Review. (read aloud)

1. In our first week we raised the issue of meaning in our lives. We reviewed the work of Viktor Frankl who postulates

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the search for meaning as basic to what it is to be human. We also looked at H. Richard Niebuhr's faith approach which sees the quest for "that which makes life worth living" to be of primary concern and to have its only true fulfillment in the one God of Jesus Christ. We then looked at the temptations of Jesus as one biblical example of Jesus' being confronted (as we are) with the issue of where he will place his faith, trust and loyalty: in the pursuit of pleasure and immediate needs, in pursuit of power, in pursuit of self glorification.

2. In our second session we examined in greater depth Niebuhr's faith position with regard to meaning. We saw how for Niebuhr the issue is not "whether we have faith," but rather "in what will we place our faith, trust and loyalty?" In a sense we may say, the issue is not "whether we will have meaning and value?" but rather "what meaning and value, what value center will we choose to center our lives around?" Will we derive our meaning from the God revealed in Jesus Christ--the source of all being and value beyond all the many relative meanings and values around us? We looked at the story of the woman at the well who had sought meaning in ways that led to frustration and inner emptiness. In her encounter with Jesus her life found a value center that could satisfy.

3. This week we encounter another biblical character who portrays a perversion of the search for meaning; who turns that into a search for "self-fulfillment."

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C. Scripture Study: Mark 10:17-22 (Mt 19:23-26, Lk 18:24-27)

1. Outline (review in some way the following content)

a. Scene is set: A dialogue is set up.
   1) Jesus setting out on a journey
   2) Man approaches: kneels
b. The Dialogue
   1) Jesus is addressed. Theological question raised.
   2) Jesus gives a rebuttal, then replies to the question
      a) Jesus states the traditional answer
      b) Cites the Decalogue
   3) Person claims to have obeyed this
   4) Jesus responds:
      a) With love
      b) Challenges to go the next step: Go, sell, give, come, follow
   5) Man departs sorrowfully

2. Background. (Material taken from lecture by Dr. H.D. Betz on this passage)

a. The address:
   1) Kneeling: gesture of reverence; generally reserved only for the deity. Later demanded by Alexander. Generally not done before rabbis.
   2) "Good teacher": an unusual form; almost never used in rabbinic literature
b. The question:
   1) Not cynical, not a trap, not insincere.
   2) This was the question for all Judaism; the goal, life in the hereafter
   3) The importance of the present life was to make one eligible for eternal life. The only question was, how?
   4) Generally obedience was the means to the end. If one were obedient, one would accumulate merit, or "fortune" in heaven.
   5) While salvation to the Greeks was more contemplative, for the Jews the emphasis was on "doing Torah", not contemplating Torah. The important question was how to fulfill the Torah; how to fulfill the requirements.
   6) Crisis in the Judaism of the time. There were many different interpretations of how to do Torah. Rabbinical schools formed around the different answers to this question.

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7) Thus, the man comes to Jesus for the answer that his group would give to this question.

c. Jesus' answer:
   1) Jesus denies it is right to call a teacher good. Only God is good and only God can determine who is good. The last judgment. Some similarity to the Socratic discussion.
   2) Jesus never referred to himself as "teacher". This is an academic title.
   3) Jesus gives a short-hand of the Decalogue. Both he and the man know he refers to the whole. This is the traditional Judaic answer to the man's question.

d. Man's response:
   1) Not satisifed with the traditional answer.
   2) Claims he has done all this; has done what the Torah requires. Yet it still remains external.
   3) It would be wrong to assume the man is a hypocrite. It may be that he has done all that Jewish piety required. The man is sincere.
   4) Theological issues:
      a) Promise and Fulfillment problem:
         (1) Do it now, fulfillment comes later
         (2) "This" life is uncertain; no assurance, only duties.
      b) Mechanistic relation between Torah and salvation:
         (1) Salvation in human hands; our doing; do all that is required.
         (2) In extreme it rules out grace; codes of law replace life in grace.

e. Jesus' Response:
   1) Jesus responds in love. Takes the man seriously.
   2) You lack one thing.
   3) Bultmann: The purpose of the Torah is to make humans realize their dependence upon God. This man has perverted this by keeping the externals but never allowing God to confront him.
   4) Jesus rejects poverty as a principle or requirement for salvation. Jesus centers upon the fact that the man's wealth makes his religious formalism possible.
   5) There is a relation between the man's relation to God and his money.
   6) Culture seeks to make religion into a convention. When this happens a person observing religion seriously, becomes dissatisfied.
   7) Real doing of Torah leads to dependence on God. But because of his money there is no dependence.
   8) Jesus saw that fundamental to judaism was honesty before God. The man couldn't handle that honesty.

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9) Nothing wrong with money or wealth, but must avoid it as related to or as a basis for faith.
10) This story points to the relation between our socio-economic standing and environment, and our faith. It provides insight into the dangerous traps of religious observance.

3. The group deals with the text:

a. Have the group come up with five or six characteristics of the man's condition: (for example)
1) The man does want help; he initiates the action.
2) He has done all that is expected but still has a sense of emptiness.
3) This is a person of great possessions; they are somehow related to his spiritual life--they have become a source of trust and loyalty.
4) He wants "eternal life."

b. Getting in touch with what we mean today by "external life"--or what our modern culture would mean: Have the group explore what are some of the "goals, the aims, people have today which might be interpreted as "eternal life" or "the good life": (possible responses: heaven, peace, security, liberation, leisure, "having it all together," happiness, etc.) Do a quick vote to get a prioritizing of the group list; each gets 2 votes.

4. An interpretation. (read aloud)

The question for this man was "how do I arrive at that which will truly satisfy me?" People try to reach that goal in several ways, but perhaps we could delineate two basic ways: seeking to save one's life, and losing one's life and finding it as a result--a by-product.

D. Background. (read aloud)

In our first session together we learned that Viktor Frankl has suggested, from a psychotherapeutic viewpoint, that the search for meaning is primary to our human nature

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and essential if our most basic needs are to be met--if we are to experience fulfillment as human beings. Frankl would want to make an important distinction and definition of the search for meaning at this point. The search for meaning is not the search for self-fulfillment, for self-actualization, for the fulfillment of our potential, or personhood.

In the concentration camps Frankl discovered the capacity to detach himself from the dibilitating psycho-physical conditions around him, and not be determined by them. He also found an innate capacity in that setting to transcend one's own self, and to direct oneself toward others, or toward meaning. He states:

> Thus human existence--at least as long as it has not been neurotically disturbed--is always directed to something, or someone, other than itself--be it a meaning to fulfill or another human being to encounter lovingly.[8]

Out of this capacity comes the will to meaning.

It is with this understanding that the search for meaning comes into view as a part of this self-transcending capacity and process. Our most "human" need, he suggests, is met only when we transcend the self toward some task or purpose, or toward some other person in love. He uses the imagery of a boomerang that is thrown out by the hunter and returns only if it does not find its mark: "(Man), too, returns to (himself) only if (he) has missed (his) mission."[9] The search for meaning is not the pursuit of "self-fulfillment."

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[8]Viktor Frankl, The Unconscious God (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1973) p. 78.

[9]Viktor Frankl, The Will to Meaning (New York: New American Library, 1969) p. 38.

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In fact he would say:

> The more one forgets oneself--giving oneself to a cause or another person--the more human (he) is. And the more one is immersed and absorbed in something or someone other than oneself the more (he) really becomes (himself.)[10]

Self-fulfillment, actualization, potential, personhood are all by-products of locating a "cause or another person" outside the self in which to find meaning.

The ear of faith can not hear such lines without hearing a resonance with the teachings of Jesus--that in seeking our own life we are lost, and in losing our lives for Jesus we are found. Which leads us to a consideration of Frankl's idea,that meaning is found when we are directed beyond our own selves, from the faith perspective of Niebuhr.

To begin with, Niebuhr's thinking would rule out the self as a proper object of devotion. True, the self has worth, but it has worth by virtue of being loved by something beyond it and beyond all "the many."[11] The fulfillment of the "self" and its actualization could never legitimately become the center of faith-trust and faith-loyalty for Christianity.

Finally, Niebuhr understands revelation in Christ to show us that our natural "search for meaning" is indeed a search for "our" good, "our" value, "our" meaning, and is motivated by our natural need to feel important, significant, valuable. None of this in and of itself is directed toward God. Through Jesus our search for good, value and meaning

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[10]Frankl, Unconscious God, p. 79.

[11]H. Richard Niebuhr, Meaning of Revelation (New York: Macmillan, 1974) p. 111.

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are shown for what they really are: an attempt to save our own necks; to preserve value and meaning for ourselves--"to keep ourselves with the love of our good in the center of the picture."[12] In this sense "self-actualization" is indeed what the search for meaning is directed toward in our natural faith. Through revelation we meet one who put us before his own "self-actualization," a reality that loves us in a selfless way. Our natural search for meaning is not voided by this but is shown to be self-centered. Furthermore, revelation sets in motion a process of permanent conversion in our "search." We find meaning not in our efforts, not in our searching and striving to find our meaning. Meaning begins with the discovery that God values us, and this is the beginning of reconstructing our "search" not around our meaning, but around God--around the meaning of love!

E. Conclusion and Application

1. Drawing in the text: (read aloud)

The rich young ruler sought meaning in his own self-fulfillment. When Jesus calls him to set that aside--the symbol of which is his possessions, he will not do it. He wants meaning and good, but his meaning and his good. All those "things" by which he judges himself strong and important and worthy stand in the way of his directing himself away from himself and toward God. His means of "saving" himself are precisely the means in which he ultimately is lost.

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[12]Ibid., p. 138.

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2. Applying it to our lives. (read aloud)

Each of us has that which keeps us from following Jesus, that to which we cling because we are afraid we will be lost without it. Where is God calling us to "loose ourselves"--to put aside our symbols of status, of strength, in order that we might become vulnerable and place our trust and give our loyalty not to these "things," not to that which we "possess" already, but to the One beyond all these. What is it that separates you from God, that keeps you from following?

a. Discussion.
   1) open the discussion to personal sharing.
   2) or break into pairs and ask them to share what that area of vulnerability is right now in their lives to which God is calling them.
b. Exercise possibilities.
   1) Exercise is intended to get in touch with how we define ourselves. Break into pairs. One asks the other "Who are you?" The other answers briefly, and then the questioner says "Thank you, Who are you?" and the questionee must answer again. After two minutes switch, then have time for feedback. Another twist is the question: "What do you pretend to be?"
   2) Have "who am I?" cards. List roles, traits, characteristics most important to you. Share those.

F. Closing

1. Give an opportunity for any last minute comments or feelings that have arisen during the time available.

2. Close with song and a prayer.

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Session IV

THE SEARCH FOR MEANING AND THE LAW

A. Opening

1. Open with Prayer.

2. Sing some hymns or camp songs. Choose songs to fit this session theme.

3. (or) Start with a brief game: split the group in two or three groups depending on its size. Each group needs at least four. Have one person from each group come up and read a word you have written on a piece of paper. They then go back to their group where they are asked yes or no questions until the group guesses the word. The object is to guess the word before the other group(s). The words you use should fit this session's theme: e.g. Responsibility, law, commandment, forgiveness, conscience, love.

B. Review. (read aloud)

Over the past three sessions we have explored our search for meaning through scriptures and through the work of Viktor Frankl and H. Richard Niebuhr. We considered the search for meaning or the search for "that which makes life worth living" as the primary need, goal, and concern of our

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lives. In our second session we examined how this search for meaning is placed in the context of radically monotheistic faith which placed God as the center of all being and value. In the last session we discovered that the search for meaning for Frankl and for Niebuhr, and for the scriptures' Rich Young Ruler is only to be found in losing the self, getting outside the self, and becoming directed toward meaning, toward God. Today we consider the search for meaning and law. When the rich young ruler asked "How can I inherit eternal life?" Jesus answered with the commandments. However, there was a need for more. Indeed many see meaning in fulfilling the law. Jesus calls us beyond law to love.

C. Scripture Study. Simon the Pharisee Luke 7:36-50

1. Getting into the passage: read the passage with one person assigned to each part, plus a narrator, as if this were a play. Encourage any actions they would like to further add to the drama.

2. Have a "fish bowl" discussion among those who read the parts. The rest of the group sit in a circle around the main characters. Those in the inner circle are asked to share what they saw from their perspective? What feelings did each have? Discoveries made in the process? When people have said what they need to say, switch and allow the outside circle to get in and share their feelings and perceptions.

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D. Background. (read aloud)

In this story we see a man who has fulfilled the laws and yet, from Jesus persepctive, is out of touch with the source of all being and value. His loyalty and trust are not directed toward God but toward some other center. In traditional terms ethics and law have been the way to express our trust and loyalty in concrete behavior and action. How is our search for that which is worthwhile related to our effort to fulfill God's will for our lives?

Viktor Frankl puts this issue in the context of a question posed by life and an answer given by a specific individual. Meaning "implies a question and calls for an answer."[13] Indeed, we may be led to the conclusion that meaning is realized as a person "answers" life's questions:

> Ultimately, (man) should not ask what the meaning of (his) life is, but rather must recognize that it is (he) who is asked. In a word, each (man) is questioned by life; and (he) can only answer to life by answering for (his) own life; to life (he) can only respond by being responsible.[14]

The "answer" we give comprises our meaning. However, it must be the "right" answer. The fulfilling of our meaning (our "answer") calls for a singular response of a unique individual in a unique situation. It must be the "fitting" answer. Our answer must "fit" into the context of our life situation. He gives an example from another author:

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[13]Frankl, Will to Meaning, p. 60.

[14]Viktor Frankl, Man's Search for Meaning (New York: Washington Square, 1953) p. 172.

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> The situation, seven plus seven equals. . .is a system with a. . .gap. It is possible to fill the gap in various ways. The one completion--fourteen--corresponds to the situation, fits the gap, is structurally demanded in the system, in this place, with its function in the whole. It does justice to the situation. Other completions such as fifteen, do not fit. . . .We have here the concepts of the demands of the situation; the requiredness.[15]

Meaning is realized as we take responsibility for our lives, as we "answer" in such a way as to "fit" into the whole--as we do that which is "required."

For Frankl it is the conscience that helps us discern the "fitting response". Conscience provides us with the "one thing that is required" for a specific person and situation.[16] The "ought" of a situation is sometimes more, sometimes less than what is required by a given system of law or ethics. No law can encompass the "ought" for all situations. This conscience is not wholly determined by our biology, it is not just the super ego, it is not the product of social conditioning. It is a kind of intuition, an "Ethical Instinct," which operates when law and customs fail to speak adequately in answer to a situation. The "one thing necessary," therefore, is guided by conscience. This ethical instinct guides our "answer."

One finds direct parallels to this concept of responsibility in Niebuhr's writings. In Niebuhr's discussion he states that there have generally been two ways of understanding the moral self. One approach to the moral life is to view it in terms of law. This sees the individual basically as a

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[15]Frankl, Will to Meaning, p. 63.

[16]Niebuhr, Unconscious God, p. 35.

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citizen of society who is born and raised in a complex of competing forces which we must bring under control and put in order within ourselves and our society.[17] The all important question for our lives is "What does the law require in a given situation?"

The other approach is to see life in terms of our goals. This sees the individual symbolically as an artist with a vision of what she or he would like to create, who shapes the material of life toward that goal. From this viewpoint what we "should do" is determined by our objectives; the ends justify and determine the means.

Both of these understandings, however, leave us unsatisfied. There are situations where the law does not go far enough; where the letter of the law is fulfilled but not the "spirit" of the law--"if he asks for your shirt, give him your coat also." "Go the second mile." On the other hand sometimes the law goes too far and needs to be tempered by the compassion of Jesus who forgave, for example, the adulterous woman. Law alone is inadequate for dealing with the complexity of life.

A goal orientation, however, is also inadequate. To follow it consistently we sometimes find ourselves breaking laws to fit our goals--laws which are important. Of course the ultimate corruption of such an approach would be the Nazi regime where any means is justified by the ends. Thus we see that either of these two above approaches, when used

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[17]Niebuhr, Responsible Self, p. 54.

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exclusively, is inadequate.

Niebuhr suggests a third approach in which the individual is seen as the "Answerer." Here the question is what is the "fitting" response to the overall "web of interaction taking place?"[18] "Response" is not mere reaction to what happens around us. Response "implies that we interpret the actions coming toward us, that we respond with consideration for what may be the subsequent response to our actions, and that our response be made in the larger context of our human global family." This could be explored in great detail, but the main point here is that for the Christian faith all our "answers" are given in the context of our relationship to God as the one true and adequate center of being and value. All our responses are made in relationship to God: each person is seen as brother or sister through Jesus: each person is seen as loved and valued by God; each person is understood as in need of forgiveness--"all have sinned and fallen short," "no one stands righteous before God", including "me". Each response is accountable not only to the "other," but also to God. Each response is made in relationship to a God whose ultimate purpose is reconciliation and making whole;defensiveness is out! This discovery of the fitting response is not the operation of a computer which feeds out the required answer to what is programmed. It is what Niebuhr would call a response based on revelation, the "reasoning of the heart;"[19] the practical reasoning as

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[18]Ibid., p. 57. [19]Niebuhr, Meaning of Revelation, p.69.

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revealed in Jesus. Finally, through revelation our understanding of moral law is continually in revolution which converts it, pushes out its bounds to include all people, converts it from a legal requirement to a response of love to God.

One last note, the conscience appears less independent to Niebuhr than to Frankl. Niebuhr thinks conscience is formed by our social context. The only question is "which social context"; the context of the Christian community or the context of a community with another center of value?[20]

For Frankl we can say that the way of responsibility is the way to realize meaning in life. For Niebuhr we can say that "that which makes life worthwhile" is discovered in a response of faith-trust, faith-loyalty to the God revealed in Jesus Christ. For Frankl meaning is a matter of becoming responsible. For Niebuhr the issue is being responsible "to what," or rather, "to whom." As a psychotherapist Frankl does not presume to answer that question.

In the story of Simon the Pharisee, Jesus praises the woman for making the "fitting" response to him. Jesus' response to the woman is in relationship to God who loves and cares for her, it is in relation to what God is seeking to do in this world through him--to bring all persons into fellowship and reconciliation. Jesus follows the law of love. Simon follows the law of piety, social custom, of table etiquette, of religious scruples.

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[20]Niebuhr, Responsible Self, pp. 70-71.

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E. Discussion. (possible questions for the group to deal with)

a. Where in the recent past have you felt called to do the "fitting thing" despite its awkwardness in the social setting?

b. Where have you experienced the law of love applied to you lately?

c. What do we do when our calling, our responsibility in relationship to God brings us into conflict with society? Does our faith convert the society and world we live in, oppose it, or accomodate it?

F. Closing

1. Give opportunity for debriefing, if necessary.

2. Choose prayer partners. Break into pairs and share an area of concern. Then in those pairs, take a moment in silence to pray for the other. Make a covenant to hold each other's concerns in prayer during the coming week.

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Session V

CREATIVE VALUES

A. Opening

1. Begin with meditation. (read aloud)

a. Relaxation process:[21] Get in a comfortable position. With eyes closed, breathe deeply. As you exhale, let the body go into ever deeper relaxation. Beginning with your feet and moving up your body, think to yourself, 'My feet are heavy, and I am at peace,' silently repeating this phrase several times and then move on to all parts of the body as you move to your head. (When this process is complete and all are relaxed and in an attitude of prayer, read the following:)

> God is more eager to give us unimaginably greater gifts than we are willing to receive. You and I can be several times more happy and creative than we are. No matter what the limitations or external circumstances may be, every person in his or her inner nature can become a radically new being a full heir of God's richest resources (Rom. 8:14-17). So important is this transformation that the whole creation "waits with eager longing" for the revealing of the sons and daughters of God (Rom. 8:19). Our families and friends are waiting. The lonely and despairing are waiting. All victims of injustice and oppression are waiting for the release of our creative compassion.[22]

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[21]Derived from Harvey Seifert, Explorations in Meditation and Contemplation (Nashville: Upper Room, 1981) p. 27.

[22]Ibid., pp. 17-18.

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With eyes still closed and in the next few moments of silence, let come into your mind one or two areas of your world that need the "release of your creative compassion," that need what you can give. Envision yourself doing so. Note your feelings. (After about three minutes the leader might say:) When you are finished, open your eyes.

b. Give a moment for any initial comments and then ask people to share, if they wish, what one special thing they had to give in their meditation, or which perhaps they have become aware of recently.

B. Review. (read aloud)

Over the past several sessions we have explored the search for meaning in our lives.

1. Session 1: We got in touch with this quest as something which affects all of us, and especially how it is an issue of faith.

2. Session 2: We explored faith as trust and loyalty in the "one beyond the many"; the source of all being and value; the one next to which all is relative--the one because of which all things can become meaningful.

3. Session 3: We found that the search for meaning is found only as we get beyond the search for "self" or self-fulfillment; it is in losing ourselves that we are found.

4. Session 4: In the search for "that which makes life worth living" we struggle with what the center of value calls us to do. For this we must search for the responsible, the

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fitting, answer--the response that fits into our relationship to God. We must follow the law of love.

C. Background. (read aloud)

At this point in our study we come to consider the various ways in which people realize meaning in their lives. In Frankl's work he has delineated what he calls "the doctrine of the specific task."[23] According to this, each of us is unique, and each situation is unique and presents us with a very specific task which is ours to perform. The tasks may change as we change and as our situations change, but our meaning is realized as we discover and fulfill the specific task placed before us at a given time.[24]

For Frankl there is no point in life when we are not free to realize meaning. However, the kinds of values available to us at any given point may be different. He sets forth three general groups of values and suggests that throughout life at least one of these ways of finding meaning is available to us: creative values, experiential values, and attitudinal values.

For most people "creative" values are the primary way of realizing meaning. The "specific task" may involve effectiveness in one's job, or utilizing one's abilities to the fullest in art or music or working for a cause. However,

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[23]Viktor Frankl, Doctor and the Soul (New York: Vintage, 1955) p. 42.

[24]Ibid., p. 55.

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should this avenue for finding meaning be cut off for some reason (e.g. retirement or disability) one is still responsible for realizing meaning in life. This can be done through what Frankl calls "experiential values." This refers to finding meaning through experiencing other persons, the beauty of art, music and nature. Finally, even in those moments when both creative and experiential values are unavailable, Frankl would content that we still have freedom to take responsibility to find meaning through attitudinal values. This third group of values concerns the stand we take toward an unalterable fate, especially suffering; the way in which we face our biological, paychological and sociological destiny. This session will focus on the first of these groups of values.

Niebuhr would respond that human nature requires that we must indeed have a cause:

> It is a curious and inescapable fact about our lives. . . that we can not live without a cause, without some object of devotion, some center of worth. . .[25]

The issue is whether that is made into the center of value; the source of value and meaning. Niebuhr would say that indeed there are numerous ways of finding and actualizing meaning. From a faith standpoint, however, they remain relative ways and relative causes next to the one and true value center which is God. In the context of radical monotheism none of our missions, our tasks, our creative endeavors ever becomes an obsession, or object of worship. They remain the creative channels through which the Spirit can act.

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[25]Niebuhr, Radical Monotheism, p. 118.

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D. Realizing Creative Values. (read aloud)

1. Examples of Creative Values: Tonight we focus on what Frankl calls 'Creative Values.' "It is Frankl's central thesis that life is transformed when a mission worth carrying out is uncovered."[26] Frankl notes such examples as a painter contemplating suicide who, seeing a portion of art uncompleted, set about his work and forgot his suicide plans. He also notes the common experience of our physical bodies functioning better when we are engrossed in some meaningful activity; fatigue and even sickness are overcome. He notes Harvey Cushing, a noted brain surgeon, who at 80 wrote, "The only way to endure life is always to have a task to complete."[27] Of course there is also the example of Frankl's own experience in the concentration camp where, stricken by typhus fever and bedridden, he kept his work on his manuscript going, writing on stolen paper with nubs of pencils. His "task" kept him going and his mind was clear. Frankl implies an even wider application of creative values when he says:

> If we only broadened our horizon we could notice that we enjoy our freedom, but we are not yet fully aware of our responsibility. If we were, we would realize that there is plenty of meaning waiting to be fulfilled by us, be it with respect to underprivileged people or with respect to underdeveloped countries.[28]

He even goes so far as to suggest global implications when he says:

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[26]Leslie, p. 76.

[27]Viktor Frankl, "Collective Neuroses of the Present Day", p. 3. quoted in Ibid., p. 77.

[28]Frankl, Will to Meaning, p. 98.

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> . . .there is hope for survival only if (mankind) is united by a common will to a common meaning--in other words, by an awareness of common tasks.[29]

2. Scriptural example: The story of Peter is one of a person who underwent something of a transformation as a result of receiving a life task; "upon this rock I will build my church", "feed my sheep".

a. Highlights of Peter before the resurrection:
   1) John 1:40-42: The "rock": sure, dependable, faithful.
   2) Mt. 16:13-18: Declares Jesus the Christ.
   3) Mt. 16:21-23: "Get thee behind me!"
   4) Mk. 9:2-6: Peter babbles; Jesus tolerant.
   5) Mt. 14:28-31: "Lord, save me!"
   6) Mk. 14:26-31: Peter boasts.
   7) Luke 22:31-34: Peter boasts.
   8) John 13:6-9: "You shall not wash my feet."
   9) Mk. 14:37: "Are you asleep?"
   10) Mk. 14:71-72: The cock crows.
   11) John 21:17: "Feed my sheep."

   Any comments about Peter.

b. Peter after the resurrection:
   1) Acts 2:14: Pentecost. Peter preaches.
   2) Acts 3:6: "In the name of Jesus Christ, walk!"
   3) Acts 4:8: Peter answers before the high priests. Their response, "Now when they saw the boldness of Peter. . ."
   4) Acts 5:17: Peter is imprisoned.

Peter becomes known as the apostle to the Jews. Peter had known failures and after the crucifixion he felt unworthy. But Jesus came to him saying "feed my sheep"--You will have to live with failure, but my mission is greater than your failings.

3. Frankl not only contends that life is transformed when a mission worth carrying out is uncovered, but also suggests

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[29]Frankl, Unconscious God, p. 140.

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that everyone has such a life task. Each of us occupies a time and a space which no one else can occupy. In our jobs we think we can be replaced. . .but can we? No one would come to that job with the same sensitivities and concerns. No one else would do it quite the way we do. In our homes no one else can give the love that alone is ours to give. It is important to realize that whatever the task which we have in life, our job, our families, a special vocation,--ours will be a special way to approach it, to fulfill it.

4. Application.(let the leader consider the following suggestions)

a. Invite people to share one area of their lives where they feel called to a task.

b. Social issues become especially interesting here. The group may take as its task a certain project such as write letters together to national leaders on an issue of their choice.

c. In one group, one woman was especially concerned with an ecological issue that was before local legislators. She shared her concern and enlisted the group's assistance in signing a petition of protest.

d. Another helpful exercise is to call up one another's gifts. This can be done in several ways. One is to have a positive bombardment circle where one is in the center and must "take" the perceptions of the group as to what talents, gifts, and abilities they see and what special task they might envision. Another way to go about this is

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simply to lay sheets out on a table with each persons name on a sheet. The group circulates around the table noting the gifts they see on each sheet. When the group returns to their seats each is given their own sheet and asked to read it aloud with opportunity for response.

5. Summary. (read aloud)

It is important that this not degenerate into a "strokes" session or mutual admiration society. It is done for a purpose. As Elizabeth O'Connor notes at her church:

> Almost from the time a person comes in touch with The Church of the Saviour (he) hears about gifts and is confronted with the question, "What are your gifts?" Another way of asking that question is, "What is your call?"--so often we come to understand our call by knowing our gifts. All the mission groups of The Church of The Savior come into existence in response to a person's call. For example, someone may want to work in the area of curing drug addiction, or in some phase of education. If (he) can sound that call so that it comes as good news to others and they want to work with (him) in the accomplishment of certain goals, then we have a new mission group. And when a new group comes into existence, one of its first tasks is to identify the gifts of each of its members so that every person is exercising a gift on behalf of the group. Each of the Potter's House (a coffee house sponsored by our church) groups has a prior, a spiritual director, a teacher, a pastor-prophet, a shepherd, and an activist or plowman. Also, each person is given a specific task for the evening such as cashier, administrator, waitress, or host.[30]

Indeed, as Dr. Seifert notes, the world is waiting for us, for the church, to shoulder the task given us in Christ in the synagogue at Nazareth:

> The lonely and despairing are waiting. All victims of injustice and oppression are waiting for the release of our creative compassion.[31]

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[30]Elizabeth O'Connor, Eighth Day of Creation (Waco, TX: Word, 1971) p. 25.

[31]Seifert, p. 27.

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E. Closing.

1. Any debriefing of the session.

2. Close with the prayer of discipleship.

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Session VI

EXPERIENTIAL VALUES

A. Opening.

1. Ask if there is anything to be shared from the past week or weeks from the spiritual diaries.

2. Signing.

3. Prayer.

B. Background. (read aloud)

In our last session we explored what Frankl calls "Creative Values." Creative Values, as we saw, were one way to realize value and meaning in life; to be directed toward some tasks to perform, cause to work for, creative project to complete, or mission to fulfill. However, creative values are not the only kind of values open to us:

> A major contribution of Logotherapy is its insistence that meaning in one's personal existence can not be limited to one narrow area.[32]

Another level of values to be realized is the experiential level, encountering another person, experiencing the beauty of art or music, or nature. On the one hand, Frankl is suggesting that there is a whole dimension of meaning and value beyond those available to us from the accomplishment

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[32]Leslie, p. 86.

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of tasks, missions, causes; values which are found in experiencing other persons and beauty. Frankl is also saying, however, that when creative values are denied us, there is still some way left for us to find meaning and value. What happens when the customary ways of achieving value through having children, creating something, serving in a cause, or fulfilling one's desired occupational dreams is denied (e.g. disability, age, incapacity, social setting)? Value and meaning are still possible.

Again, it should be remembered that meaning can not be limited to one set of values. Indeed, often there is one principal way in which we tend to realize value, but several ways may work in combination as well. It is important too that one way of realizing value not rule out another. It is important, for example, that our task orientation does not become so dominant that it interferes with our experiential values with people. Sometimes in our busy lives of work and achievement, people become eclipsed. Finally, different circumstances and situations may call for different ways to find meaning. Sometimes it is time to work. Sometimes it is time to enjoy being together.

Niebuhr would respond by saying that all value is in some way "relational." His theory of value is called "Relational Value Theory." He suggests that value does not exist in and of itself but occurs in the relation of being to being.

> For if anything existed simply in itself and by itself, value would not be present. Value is the <u>good-for-ness</u> of being for being in their reciprocity, their animosity, and their mutual aid. Value can not be defined or intuited

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> in itself for it has no existence in itself; and nothing is valuable in itself, but everything has value, positive or negative, in its relations. Thus value is not a relation but arises in the relations of being to being.[33]

When one person "meets the needs," "fits the capacity," or "corresponds to the potentialities" of another, if one person completes, furthers or complements another person, this is a positive value. If people thwart, stifle, starve, or inhibit others, they are of negative value, or evil.

In this context of relational values the "right" is what is a good for those in relation, complementing and contributing to the realization of one another's potential. The "good" is what is good not only for one's own needs, but what is "right"--that is, what is good for the other as well as the self. As we have seen, for Niebuhr the self exists not primarily in relation to law or to ideas, but in relation to selves. It is in the I-Thou relation that value is found.

Finally, meaning and value can not be found in I-Thou interactions, but must also include what he calls the "third" in every relationship, in every dialogue.[34] To be responsible we must also shape our responses, and thus seek to realize meaning and value, in relationship to a third beyond the partner being encountered. The triad may be self, companion and nature if we are hiking at Joshua Tree Monument. It might be self, companion, and a cause if we are Marines in the Marine Corps. However, Niebuhr would have us consider also the transcendent "third."[35] Consciousness of the third

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[33]Niebuhr, Radical Monotheism, p. 107.

[34]See above pages 61-62. [35]See above page 65

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in every relation pushes one's awareness to a more universal referent or context. For the Christian faith this pushes our response to our companion to also include the transcendent reference. In the church, for example, we respond to each other, but also to a third: Jesus. However, there is also a transcendent third to whom Jesus points. In our context of relational values, we would conclude that faith would cause us to respond in relation to the "universal other," the center of universal community and universal history. Our response must "fit" into this ultimate "relation."

The final step in Niebuhr's progression is an affirmation of faith: "God is acting in all actions upon you."[36] The one in whom and in relation to whom we experience value and meaning is the self revealed in Jesus Christ. As we place our faith trust and loyalty in this one self we experience this self as confronting us, limiting us, contributing to our becoming, in every encounter and experience of our lives. As Niebuhr says: ". . .so respond to all actions upon you as to respond to God's actions."[37] Therefore, if we are to appropriate Frankl's concepts of experiential values, we must from a faith position be open to God, the transcendent third, who meets us in every relationship, and who in that relationship confers value and meaning.

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[36]H. Richard Niebuhr, The Responsible Self (New York: Harper & Row, 1963) p. 126.

[37]Ibid.

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C. Biblical Foundations. Luke 10:38-42 Mary and Martha.

1. Bringing it to life: Read the story. Choose characters and actually act it out. Have people actually go outside, knock and come in, making their characters come alive. Perhaps have Martha actually clattering about in the kitchen. After the action is over, have each character share what it felt like and what she or he discovered.

2. Summary. (read aloud) In this story Martha embodies the way of creative values. There is no devaluation of these. Mary chooses another way of realizing value in this setting--that of experiential values. Here is an example where one way of finding meaning becomes an end in itself rather than a means of fulfilling loyalty to God. In the process it becomes insensitive to human beings. (Stop for responses. Ask the group which kind of values they tend to realize most of the time.)

D. Realizing Experiential Values. (read aloud)

1. Experiencing other persons is something to which we sometimes give only half our attention. Being "present" to another is not always simple or easy. Listening is difficult, but it is an important way we come to know others. Let us take some time to explore the various dimensions of listening in the hopes of sharpening and increasing experiential value between us and of becoming more open to God's presence in each encounter.

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2. Hearing and listening. Hearing is a sensory perception. Sound is transmitted and picked up by nerve endings in the ear. Listening, however, means that we take these sounds, decode them and interpret them to arrive at a message for us. Listening means more than just hearing sounds. It suggests an awareness of the "other," of who that person is, and of who we are to each other. It suggests that I know the meaning of the message. It suggests some personal involvement in what is being said.

a. Exercise in "hearing": (Pairs) share an experience from this past week. Stop every other sentence or so and have the "hearer" parrot back what is said verbatim: word for word. Then switch. (Give an opportunity for feedback, debriefing.)

b. Exercise in "Listening": (Pairs) share a very positive or negative experience from the past week. This time the listener is asked to respond each time: "I hear you saying that you were feeling_____." Identify feelings of the speaker and answer only about their feelings. (Switch after a few minutes. Debrief.)

c. Exericse in "Listening" with your eyes! We listen with, we experience others, with more than just our ears, and we respond with more than just our voices. Again, have one partner share an exciting experience from her or his week. This time the listener can only give non-verbal responses (but refrain from touching the other). Notice how important eye contact, and other non-verbal signals are.

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Also sharpen your observation skills; what clues do others give of their feelings: eyes, facial expressions, bodily movements, posture.

3. Experiential values through touch. Touch is a very important form of communication. A hand on the shoulder, a handshake, the squeeze of a hand, a hug, can often communicate more than words and at a deeper level. There are some who would advocate more random touching. However, perhaps there is some natural inner caution which must be respected when it comes to touching others. Touching, as well as being extremely significant and valuable, can also be manipulative. To be valuable our touch must be meaningful, it must take place at a level appropriate to our relationship.

Exercise: This exercise is designed to increase our sensitivity of touch, and our sensitivity to how it functions as a form of communication. (Source unknown; experienced in "The Ministry of Jesus As A Model for Ministry", a class offered by Dr. Paul Schurman at STC). (If people do not wish to participate it would be awkward to have them remain in the room. The following are suggestions for the leader.)

a. Have pair face each other sitting down, eyes closed.
b. Tell them that all contact is limited to their hands; hand to hand!
c. Ask them to touch each other's hands and get acquainted with them. What do they find out about others through their hands?
d. Suggest they be playful with their hands.
e. Then suggest they be assertive with their hands.
f. Then suggest they be gentle and loving with their hands.
g. Then suggest they say goodby with their hands.
h. Debrief.

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When all these different aspects of listening are put together the experience of the other can be heightened.

4. Experiencing the Self: Do this exercise if there is time.

   a. A guided fantasy.
   b. Begin with relaxation.
   c. Eyes closed, ask them to listen for the quietest sound they can hear; the loudest; then as many sounds as possible, pick them out. Note how each makes you feel.
   d. Remaining still, not moving the head, suggest they open their eyes and let their eyes roam the scene before them. Suggest they think of their eyes as the lens of a camera and let it focus in on the variety of colors, shapes, sizes, people, shades of light to be enjoyed. Close eyes periodically to check out how these sights make one feel.
   e. Finally close eyes again. Picture yourself in a house. Notice who is there in the living room with you. Imagine that Christ is there and that you have chosen to sit at his feet and listen. What would he say to you? What is your response? How do the others respond to what he says? When you are ready say goodbye to that setting and return to this one. Debrief.

E. Close in a circle with prayer.

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Session VII

ATTITUDINAL VALUES

A. Opening with Prayer.

B. Background. (read aloud)

The final group of values which Frankl discusses are called "Attitudinal". Even in moments where both creative and experiential values are cut off, Frankl contends that we still have the freedom to take responsibility for our lives and to find meaning. Frankl knew this experience himself from the Concentration Camps where even the possibility of experiential values was denied. Here we see in contrast the starkness of the human condition, yet the dignity of the human spirit. On the one hand he writes:

> There is nothing else to do but to shovel, and nothing else to experience but punishment, hunger and cold.[38]

Yet, he also writes:

> In the realization of attitudinal values (he) is free--free "from" all conditions and circumstances, and free to the inner mastery of (his) destiny, "to" proper upright suffering. This freedom knows no conditions, it is a freedom "under all circumstances" and until the last breath.[39]

This third group of values concerns the stand we take toward an unalterable fate, and more particularly towards

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[38] Leslie, p. 98. [39] Ibid.

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suffering. It has to do with how we face the destiny which is ours due to our biological, psychological, and sociological context. The courage and dignity with which persons face this fate, Frankl believes, are among the highest human values.

Frankl experienced within himself a freedom to choose how he would face the suffering of the concentration camps. He also notes the experience of others who also realized attitudinal values. He tells of a person whose tuberculosis was in its final stages. The person wrote:

> When was my life richer? All that time when I was frightfully useful, and had so many duties that I did not know what to do? Or in those last years of spiritual struggle with a thousand problems? Even the struggle to conquer the fear of death, which has tormented, haunted and hunted me to an inconceivable degree--even this struggle seems to me to have been more valuable than all my professional achievements.[40]

He tells also of a mathematician facing the discovery of what would be certain death due to a medical condition:

> I get this last chance to test my fighting spirit, only this is a fight where the question of victory is ruled out from the beginning. Rather, it's a last exertion of a simple strength, a last gymnastic drill as it were. I want to bear the pain without narcotics as long as it is at all possible. "A fight for a lost cause?" In terms of our philosophy, that phrase has to be striken off the books. The fighting alone is what counts. There can not be any lost causes. . .In the evening we played Bruckner's Fourth, the Romantic Symphony. I was filled with emotion of love for all (mankind,) a sense of cosmic vastness. For the rest, I work away at mathematics and do not give way to sentimentality.[41]

In these examples Frankl seeks to illustrate a capacity to find meaning through the attitude one takes toward one's own suffering and even death. One may choose bitterness, hate,

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[40]Viktor Frankl, Homo Patiens, p. 66 quoted in Leslie,p.99.

[41]Leslie, Ibid.

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anger, or choose to face that suffering and endure it in a way that is meaningful.

For the Christian faith suffering and death are understood in relation to God revealed in Jesus Christ. The revelation in Christ functions in several ways to open the way for meaning and value. To begin with, revelation functions as a parable or analogy for the events of our lives. Through this parable the present becomes understood as the scene in which the God who was active in the events of Jesus' life, ministry, betrayal, suffering, and death, is understood to be active in the events of our lives. His story becomes our story. Niebuhr puts it:

> Not with complete clarity, to be sure, yet as in a glass darkly we can discern in the contemporary confusion of our lives the evidence of a pattern in which, by great turmoil of (men) and God, a work of redemption goes on which is like the work of Christ.[42]

God is also understood to be active in our story, even in our sufferings and death.

Another way the revelation in Jesus functions is that in him is demonstrated the potential for human faithfulness, and is demonstrated the faithfulness of God. In Jesus we see what it is to be faithful; to trust God and to be loyal to God in the face of conflict, opposition, and persecution. At the same time, Jesus reveals the faithfulness of God.[43] In the resurrection we hear the message that God did not forget

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[42]Niebuhr, Meaning of Revelation, p. 91.

[43]James W. Fowler, To See the Kingdom (Nashville: Abingdon, 1974) pp. 160-161.

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Jesus' faithfulness, but acted to preserve his value and meaning even beyond the bounds of death. The seeming meaningless and injustice of Christ's death would tempt us to interpret life as a meaningless exercise in futility which lands even the most pure in a meaningless end. The resurrection brings a reinterpretation of this understanding of God and of life's destiny. The resurrection encourages us to trust in One whose goodness and love for us is not destroyed in death.

Finally, the suffering and death of Jesus is the "expression and symbol of a participation by God in the suffering of the beings dependent on God."[44] In our suffering we might ask, "how can we believe in a God who is all powerful, and all good in a world of so much evil and pain?" Through Jesus we see a God whose power is not like that of the world's:

> The power of God is made manifest in the weakness of Jesus, in the meek and dying life which through death is raised to power. We see the power of God over the strong of the earth made evident not in the fact that God slays them, but in God's making the spirit of the slain Jesus unconquerable. Death is not the manifestation of power; there is a power behind and in the power of death which is stronger than death. . .the omnipotence of God is not like the power of the world which is in (his) power. (His) power is made perfect in weakness and (he) exercises sovereignty more through crosses than through thrones.[45]

Through Jesus we see a God who has chosen to share in human suffering. God has granted us freedom and autonomy and does not force reconciliation. At the same time God enters into the suffering caused by that autonomy and freedom as a part of God's effort to redeem us. God is not deaf or aloof of

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[44]Ibid., p. 161.

[45]Niebuhr, Meaning of Revelation, p. 136.

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the human condition, but suffers the consequences, in Jesus, of the possibility of human sinfulness which God's power allows in order also to bring about the possibility of salvation which God's goodness and love creates.

C. Scripture Study. (Perhaps have different people read. Give time for comments.)

1. II Corinthians 4:7-18: "Afflicted in every way, but not crushed."
2. II Corinthians 6:4-10: "As sorrowful, yet always rejoicing, as poor, yet making many rich, as having nothing yet possessing everything."
3. The Passion Narrative: Mark 14:32-36, Gethsemane, "Not my will, but Thy will be done".
4. The death: Luke 23:32-49; "Father forgive them. . ." Luke 23:46,"Into thy hands I commend my spirit."

D. Application. (read aloud)

In approaching the issue of suffering and our response to it we must do so with great respect. This is one issue about which there can be no prescription from an outsider. It is something which is a matter of personal choice. However, Frankl suggests that meaning can be found even in suffering, and the Christian faith teaches that suffering and death are not the conclusion of "life."

Exercise: (Suggestion for leading the exercise) Suggest that people individually write their own eulogies about their imaginary last year of life. The facts of their suffering and death would be suggested as:

a. In September they were notified of a fatal disease. Treatment could be attempted, but the doctors held little hope. They told them that the pain would be intense.

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b. One year later they died.

Feedback: Make it clear they will not have to share these with the group. Feedback may be more along the lines of feelings, observations, or discoveries that came out of the exercise.

Sharing: Give an opportunity for people to share how suffering has been a part of their lives or the lives of their loved ones. What were those times like? Was it a wasted time, or were there values realized? How was faith a resource in those times?

E. Closing.

1. Give an opportunity for sharing about the past several weeks; lifting up some of the things which they have discovered about themselves, meaning in their lives, experiences that were significant, appreciations, hopes.

2. Close with song and prayer (Kum ba ya)

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SUMMARY

This project has sought to explore and integrate the perspectives of H. Richard Niebuhr and Viktor Frankl on the issue of the search for meaning. The study began by considering Frankl's theory of the search for meaning. We saw his logotherapeutic approach which emphasizes understanding the individual in his or her full dimensionality; that is, from a viewpoint which includes what we would call the noological, the spiritual dimension. This dimension makes possible freedom and responsibility and is the seat of the will to meaning. His concern is that a truer picture of human wholeness be put into practice that treats the person as more than the product of psycho-physical determinates, factors, motivations, satisfactions. From the perspective of this fuller dimensionality the principle questions in "human" life begin to revolve around issues of the realization of meaning and value in life. Meaning is realized as one's freedom and responsibility are exercised in response to the circumstances which life presents. Furthermore, meaning is realized as we are directed <u>outward</u> toward something or someone to love or a meaning or purpose to fulfill. From his understanding this can happen even through the experiences of suffering and death. Finally, he identifies three general groups of values which can be realized at various points along life's journey.

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Secondly, our study considered the possible response which the theology of H. Richard Niebuhr would make to the issues raised by Frankl. To begin with we found that when the search for meaning is placed in this faith context, the question immediately becomes; "what is it that one places faith in, makes commitment to, which makes life worth living?" "What is the center of value from which one derives meaning and to which one is loyal and faithful?" For Christianity, revelation presents the only true, ultimate, adequate, unified, powerful and good center of faith and value. Through revelation our natural faith in many value centers, or in some selfish and/or inadequate center of value (and its concommitant defensive form of ethics) is shown to collapse and fail us. Revelation further reveals even our search for meaning to be self-centered and selfishly motivated. It sets in motion a process of conversion which moves from the initial experience of judgment upon our natural faith, to discovery that our real value and meaning is ultimately found in the recognition and experience that we are valued by God, and hopefully issues in trust and commitment to the purposes of this God revealed in Jesus. Finally, revelation brings a conversion of our knowledge of what those purposes are. Deontological and teleological approaches to carrying out God's will are shown inadequate by themselves. Instead, it is by way of "answering" to God in each situation that one is "responsible" and finds meaning and value. One can respond to God--the one true source and center of all meaning and value--in each encounter and occurrence of life.

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The final section of the project was intended to bring together the insights of both these people in a way that would assist persons in the local church to explore and work through meaning and value questions in their lives. The first session is designed to introduce the search for meaning raised by Frankl as an issue in human life, and to place that issue squarely within the context of faith as described by Niebuhr and as found in scripture. The second session focuses more explicitly on how the search for meaning fits into the context of faith, the nature of faith, centers of faith and value, the role of Christ in the search for a true faith center. The third session is a critical point in the group study experience because it presents a crucial point of integration: the search for meaning must get beyond the search for one's self; it must get beyond the self and be directed to something or someone outside the self. The fourth session explores the issue of meaning and responsibility; how does one discover what "answer" to life's circumstance will give meaning? Sessions five, six, and seven explore various ways which Frankl has suggested persons realize meaning and value in their lives. They follow Frankl's distinction between creative, experiential and attitudinal values. These are treated also from the faith perspective of Niebuhr and placed in biblical contexts. The session on creative value seeks to help members of the group become aware of their missions or tasks to which God may be calling them. The session on experiential values places all encounters within the context

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of our relationship to God in Jesus the Christ and is designed to sharpen the skills needed to fully realize experiential values. The last session explores the integration of Frankl's attitudinal values and faith's suffering love of Jesus--the work of redemption that suggests God, hence meaning, is to be found even in suffering and death.

In the evolution of this project the small group design has been utilized twice, with numerous alterations. The intent is that a pastor, utilizing the more in-depth background material supplied in the first three chapters, could lead the seven group sessions as they are presented; realizing that the special needs of each unique group call for adjustments. It is also evident that seven sessions do not exhaust the possible topics which the creative group leader might choose to explore. For example, there might be a session dealing in greater depth with Niebuhr's understanding of how revelation illumines our past, present and future. It is my sincere hope that the project and the groups which have been carried out have somehow contributed to those participants' lives and thereby to the life of the church as it seeks to be faithful to its Lord in this day and age.

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